



An A-Z Dictionary of France

A



What is the Académie Française? What do the letters AFP stand for? What was the Appel du 18 juin?

Look no further, here are the answers to these questions, and to many others concerning French words, initials, eponyms or names beginning with A.

Photo top of page: the **A**rc de Triomphe

AB - Agriculture Biologique - the **AB** label is a French certification for organic food products. The word "*bio*" or "*biologique*" are the French words for "organic", in the food and agricultural meaning of the word..

Académie : Word most commonly used to refer to the Local Education Authority in a French region, as in "*L'Académie de Dijon*", which is the local education authority for the Burgundy area. The director of an *Académie* is a senior civil servant known as the **Rector** (le Recteur).

Académie Française. . The French Academy is an academy of letters, whose main function is to monitor and prescribe the development of the French language. It is one of the most respected of French institutions. Founded in 1635 during the reign of King Louis XIII, it is a self-perpetuating Academy of forty members, known as "*les Immortelles*". Academicians are elected for life by the other Academicians. The Academy publishes an official dictionary of the French language, but its opinions are not always respected even by the writers of official documents. In recent years, the Academy has been slow to adapt to the changes in the French language resulting from the influence of English and American, and of youth culture in general. It has fought a rearguard but generally unsuccessful action to preserve the French language from contamination by English; some successes have however been marked up, such as the replacement of "*une pipeline*" by "*un oléoduc*" (once the main word to describe a pipeline, "pipeline" has virtually disappeared from modern French), or - to a lesser extent - "*hit parade*", which now coexists with "*palmarès*". Yet in spite of its efforts, the flow of neologisms from English to French continues unabated.

Acte de vente The official document, signed by all parties concerned, attesting the sale of a property. See [buying property in France](#).

Acte notarié A document of any sort whose authenticity is duly vouched for by the signature of a [notaire](#) (notary, or lawyer).

Action directe: Left wing urban guerilla organisation responsible between 1979 and 1987 for a campaign of bombings and assassinations, including that of the former Renault boss Georges Besse; allied for a period with Germany's Red Army Faction. The group was always very small, with only a handful of active participants.

ADSL - (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) : the expression generally used in France to describe a broadband Internet connection or service.

AFNOR -Association française de normalisation : the AFNOR is the French standards institute, and a member of the International Standards Organisation (ISO). It is responsible for determining French industrial standards, in line with European standards, and if necessary overseeing their application. AFNOR delivers certificates of conformity, allowing products to display the AFNOR label, the French equivalent of Britain's Kitemark.

AFP - Agence France Presse: The main French press agency (like Reuter's in the UK or AP in the USA), providing raw news and information to the press and broadcast media in France and worldwide. AFP is the world's oldest established news agency, founded in 1835 by Charles-Louis Havas, the father of global journalism.

Agreg : see *Agrégation*

Agrégation, Agrégé : The Agrégation is a competitive exam for the recruitment of a privileged category of secondary-school (high school) teachers in France, known as agrégés. The system was first introduced in 1766. The exam is open to candidates who are either already qualified secondary teachers, or else students who have already completed at least one year of postgraduate studies (a [maîtrise](#) or the first year of a masters). Each year, a number of places are made available in each of the subjects for which an Agrégation exists. There are always far more candidates than places, since obtaining the agrégation puts teachers or future teachers on the fast track to promotion, gives them less teaching hours than ordinary qualified teachers, better chances of getting a job in a top lycée, and in some though not all cases is a virtual prerequisite for applying for lectureships in French universities. Though the agrégation is specifically a qualification for the teaching profession, the competitive exam itself has little or nothing to do with teaching, being academic and research-based. Consequently, the system has been regularly criticized from within the teaching world as being outdated and inappropriate. In the disciplines of law and medicine, the agrégation is specifically a competitive exam for the qualification of university professors.

Air France. The French national airline, which merged with KLM in 2007. The main operator of domestic flights in France, and one of the world's biggest international airlines.

Alliance française. The French equivalent of the British Council, a public agency in charge of promoting French culture and the French language in France and worldwide. Founded in 1883, the Alliance runs the flagship school in Paris ([website](#)) dedicated to the teaching of French as a foreign language, plus language schools in other French cities and abroad. It also runs teacher training courses, oversees certification of diplomas, and promotes French culture and cultural events abroad.

Alpes. The Alps, France's and Europe's highest mountain range. The summit of Mont Blanc, the highest peak in the Alps, is situated on the French-Italian border. The French Alps spread over two regions, Rhone Alpes in the north, and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur in the south.

Alsace. the most easterly region of France, lying between the Vosges mountains and the Rhine, capital [Strasbourg](#). Many of the inhabitants of this region are bilingual, speaking both French and Alsatian, a dialect of German. See the [Alsace guide](#) page

Alsace, vins d'. Alsace wines, mostly white. See the [Guide to French Wines and Wine regions](#).

AMF - Autorité des Marchés Financiers : Founded in 2003, the AMF is the watchdog body responsible for overseeing operations on the French stock exchange, la [Bourse](#). The AMF resulted from the merging of the former [COB](#), the CMF (Conseil des marchés financiers) and the CDGP. It was modeled on Britain's Financial Services Authority, though does not cover quite the same range of responsibilities as the latter.

Amoco Cadiz Supertanker that ran onto rocks off the Breton coast in 1978, causing one of the world's major oil spillages. 1.6 million barrels of oil spilled into the ocean, and a lot of it ended up on the Breton coast.

Amuse-gueule or amuse-bouche : more formally known as Mise en bouche : appetizer, small savoury pastry or delicacy presented usually with an apéritif or a pre-meal drink.

ANPE Agence Nationale Pour l'Emploi - the former French equivalent of UK Jobcentres. Publicly run employment offices, the ANPE were merged into a new structure known as [Pole Emploi](#) at the start of 2009.

AOP - Appellation d'origine protégée. See [Appellation contrôlée](#), below.

Antenne 2 the former name of what is now known as France 2, the main public television channel in France.

Appel du 18 Juin - the most famous wartime speech made by General de [Gaulle](#) on 18 June 1940, calling all Frenchmen to arms in defence against the Nazi invader. The speech was given from London, on the airwaves of the BBC, and was widely printed and circulated in France from the next day onwards. It is generally considered to be the founding speech of the French Resistance movement.

Appellation contrôlée (or AOC)... Quality label used to given to certain types of food or drink (notably [wines](#) and [cheeses](#)) that come from a specific geographic area, and are produced according to specific quality and quantity criteria. Since 2009, AOC labels are in the process of becoming AOP labels, Appellation d'Origine Protégée, following a shake up in wine classification affecting the whole European Union.

Aquitaine The south west [region of France](#), capital Bordeaux. It covers large parts of the historic provinces of Guyenne and Gascony, and stretches from Perigord in the north to the Pyrenees in the south. For more information see [Aquitaine regional guide](#) .

Arc de Triomphe: The great triumphal arch located in [Paris](#), at la Place de l'Etoile, the top end of the Champs Elysées, between the Louvre and la Défense. The arch was commissioned by Napoléon in 1806

Arc de Triomphe, Prix de l' the "Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe" is one of the four great events in the French horse racing calendar. It is a 2400 metre flat race, run each year at the racecourse at Longchamp, just outside Paris, on the first Sunday in October.

Argus, L' : Famous French car magazine, listing the resale prices of used cars. The "côte de l'argus" is used as a benchmark when buying or selling a used vehicle.

Armed forces. Since the phasing out of conscription in 2001, the French armed forces have become fully professional. In 2001, the total manpower of the French military was 516,112 people, 216,538 of them in the *Armée de Terre* (the land army), 70,802 in the *Armée de l'Air* (the Air Force), and 59,450 in the *Marine Nationale* (the navy). The total figure also includes 100,358 men and women in the **Gendarmerie**, which, though a police force, is considered as one of the armed forces in France. A further 65,964 people were employed in general military support and social services.

Arrêté, un : An *arrêté* is an order, a decree or a by-law, signed by someone in power, such as a minister or the head of some level of territorial authority. An *arrêté préfectoral* is thus a by-law or order, signed by the [Prefect](#), and applying to some issue, location or activity under his jurisdiction.

Arrondissement. The word used to define the administrative districts of the major French cities, notably [Paris](#), [Lyon](#) and [Marseilles](#). The city of Paris (that is Paris within the limits of the old walls and the modern **boulevard périphérique**) is divided into [20 arrondissements](#), numbered clockwise and in concentric circles from the centre. Probably the two most famous arrondissements are the fifth, containing the **Latin quarter** and the **Sorbonne**, and the sixteenth, the most affluent district of central Paris. Each arrondissement has its local council and its mayor, as well as its town hall or **hotel de ville**.

Article 49.3 Controversial article in the constitution of the [Fifth](#) Republic (the current French constitution), allowing a government to push unpopular measures through parliament without a vote. In 2008, President Sarkozy introduced a [constitutional reform](#) which, among other things, limited the scope of application of this article.

Assas Name popularly used to refer to the [University](#) of Paris II. Paris II was created in 1968, when the big University of Paris was broken down into constituent elements. Assas is principally renowned as France's main law school, though it also offers courses in business, politics and economics. Its students have a reputation of being rather conservative. Former students include President Mitterrand, and former prime ministers Michel Rocard, Jean-Pierre Raffarin and Dominique de Villepin.

ASSEDIC Associations pour l'emploi dans l'industrie et le commerce : Organisations responsible for collecting unemployment benefit contributions from employers, and distributing unemployment benefit to claimants. ASSEDIC are also responsible for overseeing the management of unemployment in France, and the training of job-seekers. Since January 2009, the ASSEDIC has been merged with the ANPE.

Assemblée Nationale. The principal French legislative assembly, also referred to as the *Chambre des Députés*. The Assembly is made up of 577 **députés**, members of parliament who are elected by direct universal suffrage during legislative elections that take place every five years. In the event of disagreement between the National Assembly and the **Senate**, it is the opinion of the Assembly that takes precedence.

Assermenté (adj.) : literally sworn in. Adjective describing an official or individual who has taken an oath of office, or been sworn in. Foreigners in France may sometimes need to provide certified translations of official documents from their country of origin. These must be translated into French by a state recognised translator, who has been sworn in as a translator, and is known as a *traducteur assermenté*.

Association loi 1901 The official French definition of a duly constituted and registered non-profit organisation, as specified by a law on non-profit associations passed in 1901.

Astérix No doubt the most famous French cartoon character, first created in 1959 by writer René Goscinny and illustrator Albert Uderzo. Asterix, a small but determined Gaul, first appeared in the French comic *Pilote*, and the first of the popular albums came out in 1961. Over 30 albums have been published, and several films made; Asterix books have been translated into over 100 languages, including Latin and Ancient Greek. Set in Roman times, the albums tell of the adventures of Asterix and Obelix, a joyous Laurel-and-Hardy type pair of heroes who lead the resistance of the ultimate Gaulish village that refuses to bow to the Roman occupier. The stories can be read on many levels, are witty and full of inuendo, and thus appeal to readers of all ages.

Astérix, Parc. Amusement park north of Paris, devoted to the cartoon character **Astérix** and his friends.

Aubry, Martine. b. 1950. Daughter of Jacques Delors, Martine Aubry is a French socialist politician, elected as leader of the Socialist Party (PS) in November 2008 after a fierce contest with her centre-left rival Ségolène Royal. As minister of employment in the Jospin government from 1997 to 2000, Aubry is best known for having introduced the statutory 35-hour working week into French labour law, a move heavily criticized by her political opponents, as having severely damaged France's international competitiveness and thereby boosted unemployment rather than reducing it. Though the Jospin government to which she belonged was committed to getting rid of "cumul des mandats", Aubry in early 2009 was simultaneously first secretary of the Socialist Party, Mayor of Lille, and president of the Lille metropolitan area.

As leader of the PS, she was much criticised from within, firstly for her very narrow margin of victory in the leadership contest (50.04%), secondly for being a "three-day-week" leader of the PS (the rest of the week being devoted to her functions in Lille) and thirdly for leading the party to its hitherto worst electoral score, in the 2009 European elections, where the Socialists obtained under 15% of the vote, just a short way in front of the Green party.

Since the Strauss-Kahn affair rocked the Socialist party in 2011, Aubry was one of the two main contenders for nomination as the PS's candidate in the French 2012 Presidential election - the other being her predecessor the more social democratic François Hollande.

Following Hollande's election she took an unofficial role as head of the left-wing opposition within Hollande's own Socialist party, subsequently moving off the national political scene to concentrate on her role as Mayor of the city of Lille

Auchan One of the main French hypermarket chains, owned by the Mulliez family.

Austerlitz, Gare d'. The principal Paris railway terminus serving routes to the south west, a segment stretching from [Toulouse](#) to the **Loire** Valley. A significant proportion of long distance express traffic was removed from the Gare d'Austerlitz from 1989 onwards, following the opening of the south western **TGV** line, that terminates at Gare **Montparnasse**. Austerlitz is the name of one of the famous military victories of Napoleon, in 1805.

Autoentrepreneur. New business structure introduced in 2009, to encourage entrepreneurship in France. The system has proved even more successful than predicted, and hundreds of thousands of people signed up for the new status in the first six months. The great attraction and innovation of this system is its simplicity. In the past, setting up as a sole trader or self-employed in France was a very complex formality, involving registration with at least three different organisations (depending on the nature of the work), for tax , social security and health service benefits; it was also fiscally heavy, with high contributions to the various "caisses", bearing no relation at all to actual earnings during the first two years.

The new "statut de l'autoentrepreneur" has done away with all this; signing up is a simple process, done on line, and those choosing this status have one single periodic payment to make, covering all their social security and health contribution charges, and even income tax. Payments are strictly based on actual earnings, so a self employed person who earned only 10 Euros in a poor month now pays his social security charge as a proportion of the sum actually earned. There are three contribution rates , depending on the nature of the activity, sales, services or professional consultancy.

Anyone can sign up for this new status, which covers not only the self employed, but also those who have a job with an employer, but also wish to undertake entrepreneurial activities as a sideline.

A secondary advantage of this new system has been to bring into the system people who previously did the odd job on the side here and there, but never declared these earnings, on account of the complexity and expense of the previous systems..

Auvergne A region in the centre of southern France, capital Clermont Ferrand. [Further information](#)

Avignon, Festival d'. The most important theatre and music festival in France, founded in 1947 by Jean Vilar. Like the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland, the official Avignon Festival, which takes place each year in July, is now surpassed in size by its Fringe, known as the "Off".

Avoriaz, Festival de film d' Annual cinema festival, focusing on the Fantastic, which took place at Avoriaz, in the French Alps, from 1973 to 1993.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

B



What does *ball trap* mean? What do the letters *BTS* signify on a candidate's CV? Where is *Le Bourget* ? Look no further, here are the answers to these questions, and to many others concerning French words or names beginning with B.

Bac. See **Baccalauréat**.

Bac+3 : (also **Bac+2**, **Bac+4** etc): formula used in job vacancy announcements and applicants' CVs, indicating the number of years of higher education that the candidate has or needs to have. **Bac+3** means an undergraduate degree (i.e. three years of higher education completed after the baccalauréat). **Bac+5** indicates a masters level degree

Bac Pro, professional Baccalaureate, a semi-vocational [school-leavers' certificate](#).

Baccalauréat: The classic school leaving certificate, taken by pupils reaching the end of secondary education. The traditional baccalauréat is called the Baccalauréat Général; a more recent innovation is the Baccalauréat professionnel (see above). The general baccalauréat is divided into three "series"; letters, science, and economic and social studies. for more detail see [education in France](#).

Badinter, Robert : (b. 1928). French lawyer and human rights activist. Badinter was appointed Minister of Justice in the first [Mitterrand](#) administration, in 1981. He is best remembered in this context as the man who successfully led the campaign for the abolition of capital punishment in France; abolition of the death penalty was one of the first major achievements of the Mitterrand presidency. From 1986 to 1995, Badinter was president of the [Conseil Constitutionnel](#), the highest court in the land.

BAFA : The **brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions d'animateur** is a diploma generally required for anyone wishing to work as a sports or outdoor pursuits assistant or instructor (an "animateur") in a holiday camp for young people in France. It is a qualification designed for non-professional and occasional employment, such as holiday jobs for students. Though it is possible to find this type of holiday job offers that do not require this diploma, it is not easy. BAFA courses are run throughout France, and consist of a week's theory, two week's practical, and a week's specialisation.

Baguette: The classic French bread stick, normally weighing 250 grammes. With a hard crusty outside, and a soft centre, a baguette should be eaten within at most 24 hours of baking.

Ball Trap Many visitors to France have been perplexed, if not alarmed, by these words, often seen on small hoardings in villages and rural France. Ball trap is actually a popular rural French sport, and simply translates into English as clay pigeon shooting.

Balladur, Edouard (born 1929) : Conservative politician, and Prime Minister of France from 1993 to 1995. Minister of the Economy in the first "Cohabitation" government of Jacques [Chirac](#) during the first Mitterrand presidency, he was appointed Prime Minister by Mitterrand at the start of his second term in office. While Chirac incarnated the traditional Gaullist wing of the conservative RPR party, Balladur was seen as more modern, more [libéral](#) and more European in his outlook - but also rather aloof and patrician. In 1995, he ran against Chirac for the presidency, and was at one time tipped as favourite, but lost out in the first round. Divisions in the RPR between the Chiraquiens and the Balladurians lasted for several years after this, notably with the sidelining by Chirac of an up-and-coming young minister, Nicolas [Sarkozy](#).

Banques: Banks, see under individual entries. [Crédit Lyonnais](#), [Société Générale](#), [Banque Populaire](#), BNP, etc.

Banque de France: the French central bank, founded in 1800 by Napoleon. Nationalised in 1945, the Banque de France has operated independently from government intervention since 1994. However, its vital role in the management of the French economy was largely diminished in 2002, with the disappearance of France's old national currency, the [Franc](#), and its replacement by the Euro.

Banque Populaire : A federation of regional cooperative banks, which is among the largest banks in France. The Banque Populaire group also includes a number of regional banks in France, and is joint owner of the Natixis investment bank. Taken together, banks in the Banque Populaire group have nearly 8 million customers.

Barbie, Klaus : (1913 - 1991) Known during the Second World War as the "Butcher of Lyons", Klaus Barbie was a notorious SS officer. As head of the Gestapo in Lyons, he oversaw the torture, death and deportation of Jews and French Resistance fighters between 1942 and 1944. Most notably, he was responsible for the torture and possible murder of Resistance leader Jean Moulin, and for the deportation to Auschwitz of 44 children from an orphanage at Izieu, a small town to the east of Lyon. After the war, he fled to Latin America, eventually ending up in Bolivia. In 1983 he was finally extradited to France, where he was put on trial in Lyon for crimes against humanity. Though he pleaded innocent, Barbie was found guilty, and sentenced to life imprisonment. He died in jail in 1991.

Bardot, Brigitte The most famous French film actress of the 1950s and 1960s. Bardot was the symbol of the sexual emancipation of the period, and the most famous French woman of her generation. Known as BB (pronounced Bébé - meaning Baby), she was for many years the incarnation of the seductive French woman, and appeared in some fifty films, before retiring from the screen in 1973. Since then, she has become a militant animal-rights activist, founding the Brigitte Bardot Foundation in 1986. More recently, she has lost a certain amount of popular respect, on account of her sympathy for a number of extreme right-wing causes. Nevertheless, in February 2008, in an international survey, she was voted the second most beautiful woman in the world, after Catherine Zeta Jones.

Barre, Raymond, 1924-2007 Prime Minister of France under president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, from 1976 to 1981. Barre, who began his career as a professor of economics in Paris, worked in the finance ministry and in the European Commission in Brussels, before being chosen as Prime Minister by Giscard. At the time, as an economist rather than a politician, he was relatively unknown to the French public. He is the only person in recent French history to have reached a top government position without first rising through the ranks of a political party.

Bastille Day 14th July. *Le quatorze Juillet* The French national holiday, celebrating the fall of the Bastille during the French Revolution, on 14th July 1789. This date was not officially declared France's national day until almost a century later, in 1880. The day is traditionally celebrated by a flamboyant military parade along the Champs Élysées, in Paris, in the presence of the President of the Republic.

Bataclan - A concert hall in the 11th arrondissement of Paris. Built in the Chinese style in 1864, it started life as a café concert. Since the 1970's it has been used as a concert venue, particularly for rock concerts. On 13th November 2015 it was the scene of France's worst terrorist atrocity, when the hall was stormed by a small commando of Islamist militants, during a concert by the American rock group Eagles of Death Metal. Ninety people were killed as the terrorists sprayed the hall and surrounding area with gunfire. A year later the Bataclan reopened with a concert by Sting.

BB - See Bardot, Brigitte

Beauce - One of the major cereal-growing areas of France, the breadbasket of the nation. The Beauce is a large gently undulating area between Paris and the Loire Valley, centred on the city of Chartres. It falls largely in the department of Eure et Loire

Beaufort - One of the most famous [cheeses](#) of the Savoy region of the French Alps: Beaufort belongs to the same category of cheese as Comté and Swiss Gruyère, though has a distinct taste of its own

Bercy (Ministère des finances). "Bercy" is the name given to the new French finance ministry building, situated on Quai de Bercy, on the right bank of the **Seine**, just beside the **Gare de Lyon**. The name is also used to refer to the ministry itself, or to its policies. The massive building, sometimes used to symbolize the size and weight of the French civil service itself, is architecturally impressive, straddling a main road and protruding over the waters of the Seine at its southern end.

Bercy, palais omnisports The principal indoor sports arena in Paris, located beside the river Seine, just a short distance from the Gare de Lyon station. the arena is also used as a venue for major rock concerts.

Bérégovoy, Pierre (1925 - 1993) : Socialist Prime Minister of France 1992-1993, at the end of the second [Mitterrand](#) presidency. Former metal worker and trade unionist, who became a close advisor to Pierre Mendès France, and later private secretary to François Mitterrand. In 1992, after the disastrous months of the Cresson government, Bérégovoy was appointed Prime Minister, in the hope that he could revive the flagging fortunes of the Socialist Party. he failed, and in 1993, the conservatives were returned to power. Just over a month later, he was found dead with two gunshot wounds to the head. A verdict of suicide was returned.

Besancenot, Olivier. b 1974. Chief spokesman and virtual leader of the NPA, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, a left-wing anti-capitalist party founded in early 2009. Prior to the founding of the NPA, Besancenot had been leader of the LCR Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire party. Very telegenic and a good speaker, Besancenot is a popular guest on radio and TV talk shows. He ran in the presidential elections in both 2002 and 2007, and each time achieved over 4% of the vote. Eschewing labels, he simply describes himself as a "revolutionary", and can be described as a classic example of the French intellectual left. Born into a middle-class family, he achieved a postgraduate degree in modern history from the University of Paris, but works as a postman.

Besançon, Festival de musique. One of France's well established classical music festivals, that takes place each year in September, in [Besançon](#), a historic city in eastern France, not far from Switzerland. The festival is renowned for its bi-annual young conductors competition.

Bettencourt, Liliane. (1922 - 2017) According to Forbes magazine Liliane Bettencourt was the richest woman in Europe. Only daughter of Eugène Schueller, founder of the [L'Oreal](#) cosmetics empire, the world's largest cosmetics company, she owned some 30% of the company's shares. In 2010, at the age of 87, she was at the centre of a politico-financial media frenzy, involving allegations of tax evasion and the illicit funding of President Sarkozy's [UMP](#) political party.

Beur Name used to describe French youth of north-African origin. The classic portrayal of France, defined with reference to the three colours on the national flag - Bleu, blanc, rouge (blue, white, red) - has been more recently paraphrased in youth culture to express the multicultural origins of modern France, using the expression Black Blanc Beur

Bibliothèque Nationale. The French national library, known to academics as the BN, was historically sited in the First **arrondissement** of **Paris**. As a deposit library, the BN receives a copy of every book and periodical published in France. It also contains the most important French collection of manuscripts and old printed books from before the Revolution. Previously located in the Rue Richelieu, in the 1st arrondissement of central Paris, the library moved in 1996 to custom-designed new buildings beside the Seine in the 13th arrondissement known as the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand. The last of France's "*grands projets*" of the 20th century, the building attracted criticism for environmentally-poor design - in particular for the idea of storing books in eighteen-story glass-clad skyscraper buildings.

Bio : Short form of *biologique*, meaning organic. See [AB](#) - Agriculture biologique.

Bise, 1. faire la b. : Kissing people on both cheeks (not on the lips) as a form of welcome, or farewell, is a normal part of life in France. It is a well codified social practice, but the format varies from region to region. Generally speaking, in northern France people kiss twice, once on each cheek, in Mediterranean France three times, and in the Paris area four times. It is customary to start with the right cheek.

Bise, la 2. : Cold north-easterly wind that blows across central eastern France, particularly during periods of anticyclonic high pressure in winter time. La bise frequently veers south between the Alps and the Massif Central, and is one of the sources of the [Mistral](#) wind that blows down the Rhone corridor.

Bison Futé The cunning bison, the mascot of French traffic-jam-avoidance schemes. See [travel page](#).

Bizuthage: traditional initiation rites that used to be popular in French universities and some high schools. The practice of bizuthage began to die out from the 1970's onwards, as many of the rites were seen as being degrading, discriminatory, or even dangerous.

Blanc, see **Mont Blanc**

Blanquette: literally "white stuff", the word is used both in cooking and in wine. *Blanquette de veau* is a veal stew - a stew made with white meat - but *Blanquette de Limoux* is reputedly France's original sparkling wine. It is said that the technique for making sparkling wine was brought to Champagne from Limoux, by monks in the sixteenth century.

Bleu : the colour blue. The word can cause confusion for non-native speakers, as it is used figuratively to refer to several completely different things. a) Blue cheese (see *Bleu d'Auvergne* below), b) a bruise, and c) work overalls. **Les Bleus** is the nickname used to refer to the French national team in a number of sports, notably football. **Un bleu**, in printing, is a monochrome printer's proof.

Bleu d'Auvergne: Popular blue cheese. See [cheeses](#).

Bleu des Causses : Cheese - An appellation contrôlée cheese which is generally delicious and strong tasting, without being sharp. A cows-milk cheese, sometimes quite crumbly, manufactured in the same area as Roquefort and quite similar tasting.

BN see **Bibliothèque Nationale**

BNF, see **Bibliothèque Nationale**.

BNP - Banque National de Paris . One of the main high-street banks in France, now trading as BNP-Paribas. BNP-Paribas is a [CAC-40](#) company, and the largest bank in the Eurozone in terms of stock-market capitalisation, and in 2007 was the world's sixth-largest bank. As a high-street bank in France, it has some 2,200 outlets.

Bo-bo 1) In French children's language, a bo-bo or a bobo is something that hurts, a bruise, cut or something similar.

Bo-bo 2) Bourgeois bohémien : a middle-class intellectual who professes left-wing views, but lives a lifestyle that largely contradicts this. The English equivalent might be a champagne socialist or an armchair socialist.

Bois de Boulogne, see **Boulogne, bois** Wood at the edge of central Paris, the capital's largest area of greenery

Bonaparte, Napoléon Bonaparte, (1769-1821). Ruler of France from 1799 to 1815. Napoleon came to power as a successful military commander in the wake of the French Revolution of 1798, initially as First Consul, then as Emperor. A brilliant military and civil commander, Napoleon established good part of the basis of the modern French state, with its centralised power structure, law, and administration.

Through military victories and alliances, he rapidly spread the power of post-revolutionary France across Europe. However, like Hitler in the twentieth century, he overstretched the capacities of his great army, when he tried to conquer Russia. The retreat from Moscow in 1812 was his first great defeat. It was followed however by his final undoing, defeat by the British army at the battle of Waterloo in 1815. Captured by the British, Napoleon was exiled first to Elba, from where he escaped, then to the mid atlantic island of Saint Helena, where he died in exile in 1821.

Bordeaux (1) A major port city in southwest France, on the Gironde, and capital of the [Nouvelle Aquitaine](#) region.

Bordeaux (2) : Wine, and wine growing region. With [Burgundy](#) and [Champagne](#), the Bordeaux region is one of the three most famous [wine-producing regions](#) in France. Historically, its fame is at least in part due to the fact that of these three big wine-growing areas, the Bordeaux vineyard is the only one with immediate access to the sea, an advantage that has enabled it to be France's major wine exporting region for many centuries.

In 1152, when queen Eleanor of Aquitaine married the English king Henry II, the [Aquitaine](#) region became economically integrated into the Anglo-Norman world, the Bordeaux region becoming a major supplier of wine for England. This historic wine exporting tradition helped Bordeaux to develop far stronger commercial links in the ensuing centuries, firmly establishing Bordeaux wines, often referred to generically in English as "clarets", on the international market.

The Bordeaux vineyard is centered round the port city of Bordeaux , along the estuary of the Gironde, and the rivers Garonne and Dordogne. It is a large vineyard, and the geo-specific appellation "Bordeaux" covers an area stretching some 100 km both north-south and east-west.

While the appellation contrôlée covers wines of medium quality from all over this region, many if not most of the top quality clarets grown in the overall area benefit from more specific and distinctive area appellations, such as Médoc , Graves or Saint Emilion, and even more local appellations such as Pauillac, Graves and Saint-Estèphe.

Unlike other wine-growing areas, the Bordeaux area operates classifications of many of its top wines, notably those from the Médoc and Saint Emilion vineyards. The best estates in these areas have the right to sell wines designated as *grand cru*. Below the grand crus come other high quality wines designated as *cru bourgeois*.

Boudin. A traditional type of sausage; there are two common varieties, *boudin blanc* and *boudin noir*. The former is made from ground pork meat and offal, and is a traditional and tasty starter for meals around Christmas. Boudin noir is blood sausage. Scots would call them "white pudding" and "black pudding", Scottish expressions where the word "pudding" is still used in its original sense, i.e. a type of sausage. Etymologically, the word boudin is the ancestor of "pudding".

Boules. French bowls, see under [Pétanque](#)

Bouilleur de cru. A dying breed, bouilleurs de cru are country-dwellers who still have the once-inherited right to produce about 20 litres of spirits per year, from fruit grown on their land, without paying excise duty. Transmission from father to son of the status of "bouilleur de cru" was stopped in 1959. However all other owners of land that is officially classified as an orchard or a vineyard have the right to produce, for their own use, about 20 litres of spirits, at a special discounted rate of excise duty, currently (2009) 7.5 € per litre of pure alcohol. In both cases, the specific allowance is 10 litres of pure alcohol; the actual volume of the liquors produced, typically in the form of Kirsch, Calvados, Mirabelle, or Marc, will depend on the alcohol content.

Boulogne France's major fishing port, located on the north coast of France in the department of Pas de Calais. Also a port for cross-Channel ferries, though less used for this purpose than in the past.

Boulogne, bois de. The largest green space in the centre of the **Paris** conurbation. Often referred to simply as "*le bois*", this old tract of woodland, situated just outside the city limits of central [Paris](#) (*Paris intra muros*), is the most famous of Parisian parks. Being situated on the western edge of the city centre, le Bois has traditionally been popular with the residents of Paris's more affluent and cultured western **arrondissements**, notably the 16th, and features prominently in many works of French literature. The park today covers an area of 846 hectares, three times the size of London's Hyde Park.

Bourget, le. The original Paris airport, located just to the north of the capital, on the RER line between central Paris and CDG airport. Passenger services operated out of this airport from 1919 to 1980. Today, it is used only by executive jets and private planes. Le Bourget airport is home to the French Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace (Aerospace museum), and every other year (alternating with Farnborough, in the UK) hosts the Paris international air show.

Bourget, lac du. Lake Bourget, located in the [French Alps](#), is the biggest lake fully in Franc. It lies just north of Chambéry, in the department of Savoie (73). The biggest town on the shores of the lake is the resort of Aix les Bains

Bourgogne, 1) Part of the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region in central eastern France, capital Dijon. The Burgundy area, formerly region, is made up of four departments, the Yonne, the Nièvre, the Côte d'Or and the Saône et Loire. It is bordered by Centre - Val-de-Loire, Champagne, Franche Comté, Rhone-Alpes and Auvergne. It is essentially agricultural, its most famous product being Burgundy wine. the northeast of the region includes the Morvan hills, the southwest covers the large flat expanse of the Saône valley. For further information see [Burgundy region guide](#).

Bourgogne, 2) the [wine](#) from the vineyards of Burgundy. The vineyards of the Burgundy region cover a narrow strip of land on the eastern slopes of the hills running south-east from the Burgundian Capital, Dijon. the heart of the Burgundy wine growing region is the small city of Beaune, where the autumn wine sale in the historic "Hospices" building is one of the high points of the wine year. Burgundy wines are classified on four levels, the lowest being the generic "Bourgogne" appellation. Selected areas of the Burgundy vineyard have their own classifications, such as Côtes de Beaune. Within these, there are smaller areas, villages and groups of villages, reputed to produce higher quality wine, such as Pernand Vergelesse or Aloxe Corton. Finally, at the top of the pyramid, there are the estate wines, such as Clos Vougeot, with its mere 51 hectares of vineyard. Finding one's way around Burgundy wines is sometimes a daunting task. The most famous brands are the reds, the best of which can keep for a good 20 to 30 years. However, Burgundy also produces some top quality, though not too distinctive, whites.

Bourse, la. The Paris stock exchange, located in the **Palais Brogniart** in the 1st arrondissement of Paris.

Bové, José. French MEP, elected to the European parliament on the list of the French greens in June 2009. Highly mediatized and self-styled leader of the *Confédération Paysanne*, an initially unofficial protest grouping of small farmers established as a backlash against the accelerating fall in the number and economic viability of France's small farms. Bové himself is a producer of Roquefort cheese, living on the barren **Causses** in southern central France. However his campaign in defence of the French small farmer developed into a more general anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movement, with Bové being arrested twice and sentenced to prison firstly for leading a group of protestors in demolishing a partly built McDonald's restaurant in the town of Millau, and later for breaking into an agricultural research facility and uprooting thousands of genetically modified plants. When first sent to prison, Bové capitalised on the event by driving himself to the jail

at the head of a procession of tractors, which received massive media coverage. To avoid a repeat of this, police arrested him a second time in 2003 with a spectacular dawn raid on his farmhouse, carrying Bové off to jail in a helicopter. While avoiding a second Bové media circus, the means employed in this arrest were seriously criticised throughout the media. Since the mid 1990's, Bové has also been present at most major international economic and social forums - including Puerto Alegre and Seattle - leading to accusations that he is not really the typical small farmer he claims to be.

Brassens, Georges 1921 - 1981. Probably the greatest traditional French singer (*chansonnier*) of the mid twentieth century. Brassens, who came from a working-class background, sang notably of Paris life, the high and the low, his songs being poems, sung to a distinctive but simple guitar accompaniment.

Brenne, la: One of the most important wetlands in France, and a regional nature park (*Parc naturel régional*), La Brenne is an inland area of lakes and streams in the Indre department of central France. Over 250 different types of bird nest in this area, and it is an important point on north-south migration routes

Bresse Flat area to the north of Lyon, characterised by a large number of lakes (*les dombes*) . The area is famed for its birdlife, and for its frogs.

Brest. Biggest town of the **Finistère** department, on the Atlantic coast of [Brittany](#), Brest is a major French naval base and France's most westerly city. The port is home to France's Atlantic fleet, and principal naval academy.

Bretagne. the Brittany region of France, situated in the north west of the country. Capital city Rennes. Brittany is bordered in the east by Normandy, and in the southeast by the Pays de la Loire. It consists of four departments, Côtes d'Armor in the north, Finistère in the west, Morbihan in the south, and Ille et Vilaine in the east. Its main activities are agriculture (vegetables, dairy products) and tourism. Historically, the Brittany province of France was larger than today's Brittany region, and also included land down to the river Loire, including the city of Nantes, which was once the capital, but now no longer in the region. For more information click for [guide to Brittany](#) .

Brevet: a) a patent. b) the nearest French equivalent to GCSE exams, an exam taken by pupils at the end of middle school (*collège*). Further details see article [secondary education in France](#) .

Brie a) [Cheese](#). There are two sorts of Brie, *Brie de Meaux* and *Brie de Melun*, both *appellation contrôlée* cheeses named after two nearby towns in the the country some fifty miles south east of Paris. Brie comes as a thin round cheese about 20 inches in diameter, with a soft white crust. This crust is eaten, not cut off. Brie is a very mild creamy cheese that should appeal to anyone who does not enjoy strong tasting cheese..

Brittany see Bretagne, above.

Brocante : jumble sale, second-hand sales. Unlike *vide-greniers*, which are essentially for private individuals, *brocantes* are generally reserved for professionals, such as antique dealers or junk-shops. The biggest *brocante* in France, with some 10,000 sellers, takes place each year during the first weekend in September, in Lille. This traditional event is open to professionals and individual sellers.

Brogniart, Palais The building in central Paris which is home to the Paris stock exchange, known as La Bourse. The building owes its name to the architect who designed it.

BTS Brevet de Technicien supérieur, a two-year higher education diploma. See [Higher education in France](#)

Bulletin Officiel: An official government publication. The best-known of the various Bulletins Officiels, often just referred to as the BO, is the Bulletin of the Ministry of Education (B.O.E.N.). Bulletins officiels publish official information and instructions, regarding the workings of areas of the public sector, the application of decrees and laws within the sector concerned, lists of vacancies and high-level appointments.

Burgundy: see [Bourgogne](#), above



An A-Z Dictionary of France

C



What does *cohabitation* mean? What is the *CGT*? What are the *CRS*? Or where is the *Cote d'Azur*? Look no further, here are the answers to these questions, and to many others concerning French words or names beginning with C

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	
R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

Photo top of page : **Champagne**, the world's most recognised wine.

CAC 40. The best known of the French stock market indices, the "CAC" (an acronym) is the index used to track the performance of the 40 largest capitalisations on the French stock exchange (**la Bourse**). In this respect, it is the French equivalent of the FTSE 100 in the UK, or the Dow Jones index in the USA. See also **SBF 250**.

Cadre : a manager or executive, notably in private sector employment. Though there is no formal definition of what a cadre is, the expression is regularly used in the language of business and industrial relations, and having the status of cadre within an enterprise usually brings privileges and specific terms of employment. Cadres supérieurs are the French equivalent of senior management. The status of cadre - albeit undefined - is extended by the French statistical office INSEE to top intellectual professions.

Cadre noir, le: See under **Saumur**.

CAF : 1) **Caisse des Allocations Familiales** : the offices of the French Social Security system responsible for paying family allowances, children's allowances, housing benefit and certain other allowances to eligible beneficiaries, except for state employees who receive these allowances directly with their pay.
2) See *Club Alpin Français*, below.

Café : popular type of French drinking establishment, usually serving all types of hot and cold drinks from coffee to spirits. Many cafés also sell croissants in the morning, and do meals at lunchtime, and sometime in the evening. In Paris, cafés often charge more for drinks served at a table, than for drinks taken standing at the bar.

Café Liégeois Coffee with thick cream on top. The name was given to the drink by president Poincaré, in recognition of the resistance to the German invasion in 1914 by the Belgian defences in the area of the city of Liège.

Caisse Primaire, or CPAM Caisse Primaire d'Assurance Maladie, the service in charge of running the [state health insurance scheme](#) in France. The CPAM is the service that receives national health insurance contributions, and reimburses most people for officially recognised health care expenditure, such as visiting the doctor or hospital treatment. It is the organisation from which European Community visitors, using the European EHIC medical card, should request reimbursement of their medical expenses in France.

Calvados : Apple brandy, distilled from cider, and produced in the Calvados department of [Normandy](#).

Camargue: The name given to the wetlands situated in the delta of the Rhône river, which are among the most important wetlands in Europe. The [Camargue](#) is famous for its pink flamingoes, its white horses and its black bulls. It is also the only area in France where rice is grown.

Camembert : 1.) The best known of France's many soft cheeses, named after 2) a village in [Normandy](#). For further details, see the [Guide to French cheeses](#).

CAMIF : Large mail-order firm, reputed for providing good value for money, which collapsed in late 2008. A cooperative formerly reserved for employees of the French state education system, the CAMIF opened to all in its later years, in an attempt to face up to competition from e-commerce outlets; but its high quality customer-care and after-sales service left it with huge running costs compared to other distance selling operations, and the firm went out of business at the end of 2008 .

Campanile: the second largest hotel chain in France, with 321 outlets in France 2018. This chain of two-star / three-star hotels, with restaurants, belongs to the **Louvre** group, France's second largest hotel group.

Canadairs : Canadian built planes, used by France's airborne firefighters, for combating forest and brush fires.

Canal Plus : France's national private encrypted pay-TV channel. Canal Plus has been a major investor in French film production. Canal Plus's sound and image are normally encrypted, except for some early evening news / current affairs programmes.

Canard Enchaîné, Le Satirical French weekly newspaper, the nearest French equivalent to the British weekly "Private Eye". Over the years, the Canard has been instrumental in revealing a number of political scandals and tracking down hypocrisy and shady dealings in public life..

Cancoillotte One of the most unusual of French cheeses, almost liquid, and produced only in the [Franche Comté](#) region..

Cannebière, la. The most famous street in the Mediterranean port city of [Marseilles](#), leading down to the Old Port

Cannes, Festival de Film After the Academy Awards, the Cannes film festival is the biggest annual event in world cinema. It is held each year in May, in the Mediterranean coastal resort of Cannes, near Nice, and attracts the glitterati of the world's film industry. A number of different awards are distributed at the Cannes festival, the most important being Cannes' equivalent of the Oscar for the best film, the *Palme d'Or* (*golden palm*); this is one of the most coveted prizes in world cinema. Less "commercial" than the Academy awards, the Cannes festival shows a broader range of films from a much wider range of countries, and is in particular the best showcase for the European cinema industry, and for "art" cinema.

Cantal : An uncooked hard [cheese](#) from the **Cantal** department in the [Massif Central](#) mountains of [Auvergne](#) .

Canton : A territorial subdivision of France. There are over 4000 cantons in modern France; most of these comprise two or more **communes** (see below), and serve mainly to define the constituencies used for the election of members of Departmental (county) councils (Conseils généraux). In rare cases, cantons may include just a single commune; and more rarely, the largest communes may be divided into more than one canton.

Cantoniales, élections : Local government elections, whose purpose is to elect members of Departmental (county) councils (Conseils généraux). These elections take place every three years, with half the seats in each council being up for reelection each time. As for most elections in France, voting takes place in two stages, and candidates can only go through to the second round if they have obtained the votes of at least 10% of registered voters.

CAPES (pronounced Cap-ess). Certificat d'Aptitude Pédagogique de l'Enseignement Secondaire. Competitive exam (**concours**) taken by graduates wishing to become qualified teachers (**professeur certifié**) in the French state secondary education service. Competition for places is generally keen, and those who succeed are guaranteed a tenured teaching job in a lycée or a collège. A number of places is fixed each year for each subject, meaning that the level actually required to become qualified may vary from year to year, depending on the balance between the number of places and the number of candidates.

Caravelle: French twin-engined first generation jet airliner, that first entered service in 1959. The Caravelle was produced by Sud Aviation, the nationalised French plane manufacturer. In under 15 years of production, 282 Caravelles were built, and sold to airlines in France, Europe, Africa and even in the USA.

Carrefour : The biggest of France's [retail distribution chains](#), best known for its Carrefour hypermarkets, and, until 2009, for Champion, a national chain of smaller hypermarkets and supermarkets. In 2009, the Champion stores were rebranded as "Carrefour Market". Carrefour is one of the world's biggest retail chains, and has expanded its activities worldwide.

Carte Bleue: the standard French domestic credit or debit card.

Carte grise: the official title of ownership of a motor vehicle in France, printed on grey paper. The carte grise is issued by the Préfecture, and must be changed whenever ownership of a vehicle changes, or the owner moves to a new department. French motorists are supposed to carry their carte grise with them whenever using their vehicle, though not to leave the document in the vehicle.

Carte Orange : a card entitling residents in the greater Paris area to buy an unlimited travel pass for use on the region's public transport network. For this and other purposes, the [greater Paris area](#) is divided into six concentric zones, and cards cover one or more zones, working out from the centre to the outer zone. The system is currently being phased out, since different Paris travel concessions are being centralised within a new smart card system known as [Navigo](#).

Carte verte: Green card, the French motor insurance certificate. Cars registered and insured in France must carry their green card at all times. Generally speaking, French vehicle insurance is automatically valid for use in other European countries, and in this respect the French Green card is the equivalent of the international Green card that UK motorists must usually purchase at extra cost if they intend to take their vehicle out of the country.

Carte Vitale: Plastic card, with microchip, attesting that a French resident is covered under the national health insurance scheme. Since the introduction of the Carte Vitale, the process of payment for medicines has been greatly simplified. By presenting their card to the chemist or pharmacist; card holders now simply pay the difference between the cost and reimbursement value, and no longer have to fill in and send in forms in order to claim reimbursement.

Casier judiciaire : put bluntly, a casier judiciaire is a criminal record. Every adult citizen in France has a casier judiciaire, but fortunately this does not mean that everyone in France has a criminal record in the English sense of the term. Most people have what is known as a 'casier judiciaire vierge', literally a virgin criminal record, i.e. an empty criminal record or no criminal record. All information is held in a central database at Nantes; the information logged in a person's casier judiciaire includes sentences passed by the courts, information concerning personal bankruptcy, and certain civil or administrative penalties. This information is not public, but elements, known as an '*extrait de casier judiciaire*' can be made available to the courts, or to the authorities, for example when a person is applying for a public sector job for which a clean record is required.

- Casino** : The second largest chain of retail outlets in France, whose shops include *Géant* hypermarkets, as well as Casino supermarkets and convenience stores. See [shopping in France](#)
- Castex, Jean**. Centrist prime minister in the Emmanuel Macron government 2020-2022. Previously mayor of Prades in the eastern Pyrenees.
- Castorama** : The best-known of France's DIY chains, present in or around most big towns and cities.
- Caté** : short for *Catéchisme*, religious instruction, preparation for la [Première communion](#), the Catholic equivalent of Confirmation in the Anglican church.
- CCI - Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie** : Chamber of commerce. These are important and effective tools for the development of local economies in France, and are responsible for certain local public services to industry, including professional training and in some cases also the management of commercial infrastructures such as ports or even airports. They are mainly financed through a levy on firms and grants from local authorities, and have the status of public bodies (*établissements publics économiques*). Each chamber covers a limited geographic area, often a department, sometimes a city, or a group of towns and cities. There are also regional chambers of commerce.
- CCP - Compte Chèques Postal** : The name given to bank accounts with France's post office; the banking arm of the national post office has been recently renamed *La Banque Postale*.
- CDG - Charles de Gaulle** : The name of the principal [Paris airport](#), located at Roissy en France, just north of the capital. The airport is the main long-haul and medium-haul airport for France, but also has domestic flights. It has two main terminals, Terminal 1 used by many international carriers, and Terminal 2 used largely by [Air France](#) and its partners. The airport is linked to central Paris by the [RER](#) express transit rail link, and to many cities in France by a [TGV](#) (high speed train) station situated beneath Terminal 2. See also [Orly](#) and le [Bourget](#).
- Centre - Val-de-Loire, le** : Formerly just called "Centre" - The administrative region in the middle of France, south west of Paris. Capital Orléans, largest city Tours. The Centre region is not a historic province of France, but encompasses an area that was historically the heartland of the old kingdom of France, the Orléanais (region of Orléans), Berry, and Touraine (the area round Tours). It comprises six departments, Cher, Eure-et-Loir, Indre, Indre-et-Loire, Loir-et-Cher and Loiret. The north of the region includes the large wheat belt of the Beauce, the south of the region has many forests and wetlands. For more information see [Centre region of France](#) regional guide .
- CES**, see **Collège** : middle school, normally for pupils aged 11 to 15.
- Cévennes, Parc National des**. One of Metropolitan France's six national parks, located mostly in the department of the Gard, in the [Languedoc-Roussillon](#) area, and covering a part of the Cevennes mountains, the south eastern range of the Massif Central.
- CFDT - Confédération Française du Travail** : one of the three big trade unions in France, traditionally less hard-line and more consensual than the CGT (see below).
- CGT Confédération Générale du Travail** : The biggest trade union in France, formerly with strong ties to the French Communist Party. Since the 1990s, official links with the PCF have been abandoned as the CGT has sought to modernise its image; but many GCT activists remain members of the party.
- Chaban-Delmas, Jacques** (1915 - 2000): Conservative prime minister of France, 1969 - 1972. Chaban Delmas was a wartime leader in the French Resistance movement, who entered politics in the days of the Fourth Republic. At this time, he was a Radical and a Social Republican. He was a minister in the centre-left coalition government of Pierre Mendès-France in 1954-55 and minister of Defence in the Radical Socialist Gaillard government 1957-8. He then rallied to the Gaullist movement in 1958, though was mistrusted by many leading

Gaullists, and did not serve as minister during the [De Gaulle](#) presidencies, though was elected leader of the National Assembly. He was appointed prime minister by Georges [Pompidou](#). As well as his national duties, Chaban-Delmas was also Mayor of Bordeaux for 48 years, from 1947 to 1995, and also Député for the city - a classic example of [cumul](#) des mandats.

Chamonix. Town lying at an altitude of 1100 metres, in the **Haute Savoie** department, renowned as the French capital of mountaineering. Chamonix is the departure point for the ascent of **Mont Blanc**, by foot or by cable car. It is also a border post at the entrance to the Mont Blanc road tunnel.

Chambre des députés, See **Assemblée Nationale**

Chambre d'hôte. The French equivalent of "[bed and breakfast](#)".

Champagne The most famous [sparkling wine](#) in the world, produced in the 34,000 hectares of registered vineyards in the Champagne-Ardenne region of north-east France . The two main centres for Champagne production are the areas of Reims and Epernay. Champagne is an [Appellation contrôlée](#), and the name can only be used to describe sparkling wine produced in the Champagne area. Other areas used to label traditionally produced sparkling wines as being "méthode champenoise", but even this adjectival use of the word is now prohibited.

The [Champagne](#) area contains the most northerly of France's major vineyards. Unlike most French wines, champagnes are blended in order to produce either non vintage champagnes (blended from different years) or vintage champagne, blended from wines of the same harvest. Consequently, since the quality of the champagne ultimately depends on a balance between the quality of the grapes and the skill of the blenders, Champagnes are also ranked and promoted by producer, not by any more finely delimited appellation . Among the most highly rated of blends are Krug, Mumm, Bollinger and Heidsieck, not to mention the very well known brands of Moët & Chandon and Taittinger.

The distinct taste and purity of real champagne is certainly due to the chalky soil and the continental growing conditions that abound in the Champagne region. Several of the main French Champagne producers have set up branches and vineyards in California, but in spite of bringing over their best master-blenders, have never been able to achieve quite the same result.

Although many people imagine that Champagnes are all white, this is not the case. Rosé champagnes also exist.

Champagne-Ardenne : Former region in north east France, lying between Paris and south west Belgium, now part of the "Grand Est" region. Capital Rheims (Reims). The area consists of four departments, Aube, Ardennes, Haute-Marne and Marne. It borders on the regions of Lorraine, Franche-Comté, Burgundy, Ile de France, Picardy and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. It is one of France's principal regions for the production of wheat, sugar beet and oilseed rape, as well as including over 28,000 hectares of vineyards, mostly for the production of Champagne. Over recent decades it has lost population, due to rural exodus and to the attraction of other regions with a warmer climate. For more information see [Champagne area of France](#) regional guide .

Champs Elysées. The most prestigious avenue in [Paris](#), running between the Place de la Concorde and the **Arc de Triomphe** in the Place de l'Etoile. The broad avenue is the traditional venue for national parades, and in particular for the **Bastille Day** parade on **July 14th**. The street is lined by some of the most expensive shops and cafés in the city

Chancellerie, la : Chancery, a name used to designate the French Ministry of Justice. See also [Garde des Sceaux](#).

Charles de Gaulle: See either **CDG** (Paris airport) or [General de Gaulle](#) (president of France) . Also, name of one of France's nuclear powered aircraft carriers.

Chartes, Ecole des : A small French Grande Ecole, founded in 1821, and located near the Sorbonne. Graduates of the school are destined for careers as museum curators, librarians and directors of public archives.

Chasseurs Alpins: units of the French army, responsible for search and rescue missions in high mountain terrain, and more generally trained in mountain skills.

Chirac, Jacques, (1932 - 2019). (adj. *Chiracien*) Former conservative (Gaullist) President of France, from 1995 to 2007. Chirac's reelection in 2002 was an unexpected twist of fortune, caused by the elimination of the front-runner, socialist Lionel Jospin, pipped into third place in the first round of the election by a surge in the vote for the far right wing leader of the French National Front, Jean Marie [Le Pen](#). Facing Le Pen in the second round, Chirac was reelected with a massive majority in what was in essence a contest between the the extreme right and everyone else. Had the second round of the election been a classic left-right contest, Chirac's re-election would not have been guaranteed.

Jacques Chirac was a highly ambitious career politician, who worked his way rapidly up the ranks of the Gaullist movement; yet his first steps in politics were actually as a militant for the Communist party, and as a student he sold the communist newspaper l'Humanité on the streets of Paris. After graduating from "[Sciences Po](#)", he changed tack, married into Parisian high society, studied at the elite [ENA](#) (Ecole Nationale d'Administration), and then began a career in politics, working for the office of the prime minister, Georges Pompidou. In 1976, he was appointed junior minister for employment in the third Pompidou government, and from then after he remained one of the most omnipresent of conservative politicians in France. From Gaullist, he became a supporter of Valéry [Giscard d'Estaing](#) during Giscard's 1974 bid for the presidency - against the Gaullist Chaban-Delmas - and was appointed Prime Minister when Giscard won. Two years later, he resigned, complaining that Giscard was cramping his style.

This was the start of his rise to the top. No longer prime minister, in 1977 he set about building his own power base, or rather his own two power bases, firstly as leader of a new political party, the [RPR](#), created out of the old Gaullist [UDR](#), and secondly by becoming elected Mayor of Paris. In 1981, he challenged Giscard for the presidency, but came third in the first round of the election, which was won by François [Mitterrand](#). By 1986 he was clear leader of the conservative opposition. When the conservatives won the general election of that year, he was appointed prime minister, ushering in the first period of cohabitation (see below) between a president and a government of different political persuasions.

In 1988, he was again a candidate in the presidential election, and again lost; but with his power base in Paris and in the RPR, he then had seven years in which to prepare his third, and first successful, challenge for the presidency.

He served two terms as president, the first of seven years, the second of five – though as already stated, his reelection in 2002 was more due to the failure of the Socialist campaign and the surprise presence of Le Pen in the second round, than in his own popularity. It is still rather early to judge the Chirac presidency in a historic perspective, but early appraisals suggest that it will not be remembered as a great period in French history. It was a time during which France dramatically failed to adapt to the changes in the modern world - the end of the Cold War and the challenge of globalisation - and failed to push through the social and economic reforms that were allowing other developed nations such as France, Germany or Spain, to find their place in the new world order.

Jacques Chirac died in September 2019

CHU, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire - University hospital, teaching hospital.

Cinquième République: The Fifth Republic, the current constitutional structure of France, set up in 1958. It is a parliamentary democracy, with unusually strong presidential powers. See [Constitution of France](#)

Circonscription électorale: Electoral constituency. There are currently 555 electoral constituencies in Metropolitan France, plus 15 for the overseas departments, and 7 for other overseas territories. Though each constituency returns a single député to parliament, current

constituencies are massively imbalanced in terms of representation; in 2007, 18 constituencies had under 70,000 voters (the smallest having less than half that figure), while the 21 largest constituencies each had over 140,000 voters. A redefining of electoral boundaries has been recommended by the Constitutional Council, and new constituencies should be defined by 2009

Cité : a complex of buildings, but not usually in the sense of the English word "city". By itself the word most commonly means a housing development, usually but not always social housing. The term is used in a number of common compound expressions. See below.

Cité administrative: local government offices.

Cité scolaire : normally an educational complex including at least two different schools, or else one school and other educational facilities

Cité universitaire : University halls of residence (en-gb), or student dormitories (en-us), heavily subsidised but fairly basic forms of accommodation for students.

Citroën : One of France's three major brands of car. Citroën is now part of PSA, the Peugeot-Citroën group. the company was particularly famous in the 1960s and 1970s for its idiosyncratic and innovative models, such as the iconic 2CV or "[Deux Chevaux](#)", the most basic production car ever mass-produced, or the aerodynamic DS (Déesse), one of the most comfortable cars ever produced, on account of its air-suspension.

Claret : Word used in English to describe red wines from the Bordeaux area. The French word *clairette*, from which claret is derived, is not used in this sense in France. Literally a claret means a red wine that is lighter (plus clair) than the darker reds from the Mediterranean area.

Classes préparatoires. University-level classes provided in major [lycées](#) , preparing students for competitive exams for entry into selective institutes of higher education. See article on [Higher education in France](#)

Clochemerle - fictitious village that has come to represent the archetypal rural community in deepest France, with its ridiculous petty squabbles and rivalries. The village was created by author Gabriel Chevallier in the eponymous comic novel, published in 1934 and popular ever since.

Club Alpin Français -officially since 2005 the FFCAM. Founded in 1874, this is a large association of hikers, mountaineers and mountain-lovers; it is a lobby for the sometimes contradictory causes of the development of mountain areas for sport and outdoor activities, and the protection of the mountain environment. It manages a network of 131 high-mountain refuges, chalets and visitor centres.

CNPF : Conseil National du Patronat Français - Former confederation of French industry, see [MEDEF](#).

COB – Commission des Opérations de Bourse : the watchdog responsible for overseeing trading operations on the French stock exchange, which was merged in 2003 into a new organization, the [AMF](#).

Cock, cockerel : In the bestiary of symbolism, the cock is the symbolic creature for France, as the lion is for England or the dragon for Wales. This symbolism is very ancient, having its roots in Gallo-Roman times due to a partial homonymy between the Latin word Gallus, a cock, and Gallia, Gaul - the Latin name for the area today known as France. The effigy of the cock is still used as a symbol of modern France; it features on the great seal of state, standing on the rudder of the ship steered by Liberty. However, *le coq* is most commonly seen as a symbol or mascot for French teams in the world of sport.

Cocos, les : slang for Communists, the equivalent of "Commies".

Code Civil : Also known as the *Code Napoléon* . The compendium of French Civil law, originally drawn up under Napoleon. The Code Civil covers the principles of the rule of law, family law, property law, contract law and individual rights and obligations.

Code du Travail : The very complex and full set of rules and regulations covering employment and labour law in France.

Cognac: Cognac is a brandy produced in the **Charentes** area of southwest France, around the town of Cognac. Cognac is distilled from the local wine, which is also used in the production of a fruity apéritif wine known as *Pineau des Charentes*.

Cohn Bendit, Daniel : Nicknamed "*Danny le rouge*". Cohn-Bendit was the most famous and charismatic of the leaders of the left-wing student uprising in 1968, which almost toppled the government of General [de Gaulle](#). After the events, Cohn-Bendit, who had dual French and German nationality, left France and settled in Germany, where he more recently achieved prominence as a Euro MP, and member of the German Green Party. He has been a MEP for both the French and the German Green parties, and was reelected in 2009, when he led the greens to a remarkable third place in the popular vote, within a few thousand votes of the Socialist party.

Collège. Middle school, the intermediate level in French school education between primary school and lycée. For more details see [Primary and Secondary Education in France](#).

Collège de France : Founded by François I in 1530, located close to the [Sorbonne](#) in Paris, the Collège de France is an academy of learning which is outside the normal education system. It provides a programme of lectures and seminars conducted by some of the greatest academics in France, but open to the public. It does not deliver any degrees or diplomas. Members are elected for life from among leading academics, and the title *Professeur au Collège de France* is the highest distinction possible in French academia.

Colombey les Deux Eglises : Village in the Haute Marne department of [Champagne-Ardenne](#) in which General de **Gaulle** had his country retreat, la Boisserie. De Gaulle died here in 1970, and is buried in the village churchyard, which has become a pilgrimage point for his followers. Political leaders regularly make a point of visiting Colombey in order to demonstrate their attachment to the Gaullist heritage. Contrary to a popular misconception, de Gaulle was not born here, nor was Colombey the ancestral seat of his family.

Coluche : Michel Gérard Joseph Colucci (1944-1986) - Very popular French comedian, whose most outstanding legacy was to have set up the "[Restos du coeur](#)", a national chain of associations working to provide food for the homeless and the needy, particularly in winter. Coluche died in a motorcycle accident, while at the height of his popularity.

Comédie Française : the original and most prestigious of France's national theatres, and the only state theatre with a permanent troupe of actors. Founded in 1680 under Louis XIV, it has been associated with many of the most famous playwrights in french history, from Molière onwards. The theatre is based (since 1799) in the Salle Richelieu, in the Palais Royal in the centre of Paris (1^{er} arrondissement).

Comité d'entreprise : Works council. Structure representing the interests of employers and employees within a company or place of work. Comités d'entreprise have been obligatory since 1945 in all companies with 50 employees or more. When a company has more than one site, they are called *Comités d'Etablissement*. These committees must, by law, meet at periodic intervals, and are the channel through which management normally communicates important information to the workforce. Employers must consult with the committees on a number of major types of development concerning the future of the company, such as restructuring, collective layoffs, or significant changes in work practices. However in such matters the committees have only a consultative role, and cannot impose their view on management. Their main active role is to manage social and cultural activities in the company. Comités d'entreprise are made up of management, elected

representatives of the workforce, and sometimes - as non-voting observers - appointed trade union representatives. Elected members serve a term of between 2 and 4 years. Frequently, but by no means always, they are trade union representatives.

Commission Paritaire, see "Paritarism"

Communauté de communes: local government administrative structure, whereby several [communes](#), particularly small communes, manage local affairs coherently as a group of communes, rather than each one acting independently.

Commune. a) The basic unit of local government and administration in France. Established after the French Revolution in 1789, the commune system of local administration was designed for another age, in which France was very much a rural nation. Even today, there are still over 36,000 communes, each with its [Maire](#) and municipal council, each with its budget and responsibilities, including local taxation and local public services. Needless to say, with some small rural communes having less than 1000 inhabitants, finding enough skilled people to run a modern commune is often a hard task; yet in spite of efforts to rationalise, such as the grouping of rural communes into **Communautés de communes**, the system remains strongly resistant to change, the loss of a commune being frequently seen as the loss of local identity, not to mention the loss of a local power base

b) See commune de Paris

Commune de Paris: Revolutionary proto-communist administration that governed Paris for two months in 1871, following French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. The people running the Commune de Paris were known as *Communards*, not Communists.

Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité, see **CRS**.

Complément retraite: voluntary additional retirement pension, based on the personal contributions made during a persons's working life.

Comté. The French equivalent of the cheese that in Switzerland is called Gruyère. Comté is an **AOC** cheese, manufactured only from the milk of Montbéliard cows, grazing in upland pastures in the [Franche Comté](#) region, north of the Swiss border.

Concorde: Franco-British supersonic aircraft, in service from 1976 to 2003: the world's only supersonic commercial airliner. Concorde had a distinguished career, until this was brought to a stop following a fatal accident in the year 2000, at Gonesse, near Paris. All Concorde were withdrawn from service (by BA and Air France) following this disaster, and though the plane later took to the air again, commercial operations were stopped in 2003, following further fears about the plane's safety. Concorde was a magnificent product of the brave new world of 1960's optimism, designed at a time when environmental considerations and fuel economy were just not issues. Its extravagant operating costs meant that it was never really profitable except on the London-New York route, and was never bought by any airlines other than the British and French national flag carriers. It was nonetheless a magnificent symbol of prestige, used by Presidents and other VIPs, as well as a fantastic technological achievement. This technological prowess seems even more significant, when one remembers that Concorde was designed and built at a time when computer operated systems were in their infancy.

Conflits sociaux: This is the expression used to describe industrial unrest, or tensions between employers and employees in the workplace. Generally speaking, les conflits sociaux include all kinds of industrial unrest, in particular strikes (*les grèves*), working-to-rule (*grève du zèle*), or go-slows (*grève perlée*). France does not have a permanent Arbitration and Conciliation service, but in the event of a major stoppage, a médiateur can be appointed to try and find a solution to the conflict. France has a reputation of being a country of strikers, but this is not really the case. Conflits sociaux are relatively unusual in the private sector, but do tend to be more common in a number of high-profile public-sector areas, such as the state education system, and the **SNCF**, where they can have a massive impact on everyday life.

French trade unions (**Syndicats**), notably the **CGT** and **SUD**, tend to be rather quicker on the draw when it comes to calling strikes, than their counterparts in other parts of Europe, but negotiation is increasingly seen as a better solution than resorting to strike action.

Congrès, le: The French Congress, a joint convention of the two chambers of Parliament, the **Assemblée Nationale** and the **Sénat**, required for the voting of proposed changes to the **Constitution**.

Congrès d'Epernay Defining congress, 1971, in the life of the French Socialist party. It was at this congress that the Mitterrand faction took control of the newly formed Socialist party, setting the ball rolling for the party's rise towards government.

Conscrits. Popularly known as Bidasses, conscripts were young men engaged in military service, le service national, in France, until this was phased out in 1997.

Conseil Constitutionnel. Composed of nine nominated members, the Constitutional Council, like the US Supreme Court, oversees the running of elections in France, and can be called upon to rule on the constitutionality of legislation passed by the French parliament.

See [Government and politics in France](#)

Conseil départemental : the local authority responsible for the running of a French "département" or county. Formerly known as the "Conseil général".

Conseil des Ministres. The French Cabinet (in British English) or Administration (in US English). In France - unusually for a parliamentary democracy - the Cabinet is presided over by the head of state, the Président. Cabinet meetings usually take place each week on Wednesdays, in the Elysée Palace, the President's official residence. See [Government and politics in France](#).

Conseil d'Etat. The highest administrative court in France, the Council of State is the body ultimately responsible for determining the legality of administrative measures. It may also be consulted by the government to determine the legality of forthcoming [decrees](#) or parliamentary bills.

Conseil du Culte Musulman : the French Muslim council, a body responsible for overseeing Islamic affairs in France

Conseil Général : Former name given to county councils in France, the local authority responsible for running a French département, and now known as the "Conseil départemental".

Conseil Régional : Regional council, the local authority responsible for running a French administrative region.

Conservatoire: public sector music school. Most French towns and cities have their conservatoire de musique; musical education is technical and classic, and strongly competitive. Students who do not reach the grade are not allowed to continue; those who complete their studies become highly competent musicians, and often go on to become music teachers or professionals. The top Conservatoire is the "Conservatoire de Paris", whose diplomas are highly prestigious.

Constitution, the French. France is a republic; the institutions of governance of France are defined by the Constitution, more specifically by the current constitution, being that of the Cinquième République, or Fifth Republic. The Constitution has been modified several times since the start of the Fifth Republic, most recently in July 2008, when the French **Congrès** approved - by 1 vote over the 60% majority required - constitutional changes proposed by President [Sarkozy](#).

The Fifth Republic was established in 1958, and was largely the work of General [de Gaulle](#) - its first president, and Michel **Debré** his

prime minister. It has been amended 17 times. Though the French constitution is parliamentary, it gave relatively extensive powers to the executive (President and Ministers) compared to other western democracies.

Constitutional Council, see **Conseil Constitutionnelle**

Contrat de travail : All private sector and contractual public sector employees working in France under French law require a work contract.

There are two basic categories of contract, the **CDD** (*Contrat à durée déterminée*) fixed-term contract, and the **CDI** (*Contrat à durée indéterminée*) permanent contract. All types of contract must stipulate working conditions and hours, and provide for employee rights in terms of paid holiday. All work contracts provide social security and health cover. On account of the complexities and difficulty of terminating CDI contracts, many employers prefer to use CDD contracts whenever possible, particularly for new recruits and young employees. There are however rules to prevent employers signing successions of CDD contracts where a CDI contract would be quite feasible.

The complexity of the system is judged to be one of the reasons behind the high level of youth unemployment in France (19.4% in 2007, compared to an EU average of 15.2% according to Eurostat).

Among proposed reforms to work-place legislations have long been plans to simplify the system of employment contracts, notably with the introduction of a *contrat unique*, or standard work contract, that no longer distinguishes between-fixed term and permanent contracts.

Contrat Première Embauche, CPE : The CPE was introduced by the **Villepin** government in 2006, in an attempt to reduce France's high levels of youth unemployment. It created a new form of work contract for young people, with less guarantees of job security than normal French work contracts. Left-wing student unions, encouraged by opposition parties, protested vigorously against the new contract, calling it discriminatory against youth, and an attack on the acquired social rights of employees. It was portrayed as a contract by which employers would be free to sack young employees without reason. In scenes reminiscent of 1968 (see [soixante-huit](#)), students closed down a number of universities and set up barricades. After initially refusing to give in, the government eventually decided to scrap the CPE which by the, according to opinion polls, had become a very unpopular plan.

Coq sportif, le : A designer brand of French sportswear. See **Cock** above.

Corail, train. Comfortable intercity express trains running on routes not designed for TGVs. Since 2004, express services on several long-distance routes have been upgraded with the introduction of newer "*Corail Téo*" carriages. Since 2014 Corail trains have been rebranded as *Intercités*, though the Corail rolling stock is also used elsewhere. See [Rail Travel in France](#)

Corse - Corsica . One of the larger islands in the Mediterranean, lying south east of the French Riviera, and north of Sardinia, Corsica is an integral part of metropolitan France, and has the status of a region. It is divided into two departments, *Corse-du-sud* (Southern Corsica) and *Haute Corse* (Upper Corsica). See also the following article.

Corse, la Question. Corsica, the large island lying between France and Italy, has long been the scene of periodic violence, including bombings and assassinations, perpetrated by radical nationalists against symbols of French government. Corsican nationalist parties and factions have strong local support, though it is clear that most Corsicans do not want independence from France. The Corsican question has dragged on for four decades or more, damaging the Island's economy and tourist industry; and while there is less in the way of violence today than there was at times in the past, the problem shows no sign of going away.

Corsica, see **Corse**

Côte d'Azur : the French [Riviera](#), the Mediterranean coast of France, between Toulon and the Italian border. The area includes many of France's most prestigious resorts, such as Saint Tropez, Antibes, Juan les Pins and St. Jean Cap Ferrat.

Côte d'Emeraude : name of the northern coast of [Brittany](#), between Cancale in the east, and Cap Fréhel in the west. Its most important towns are [St Malo](#) and Dinard.

Côte d'Opale : the north east coastline of France, bordering the Straits of Dover, and stretching from the Baie de Somme to the Belgian border. See [coastlines of France](#)

Côtes du Rhone. Major French [vineyard](#). The Côtes du Rhône vineyard runs for over 200 kilometres down the Rhone valley from the south of [Lyons](#) to the [Camargue](#). Within the region, there are a number of prestigious smaller areas such as Côte Rotie (in the northern part of the region), Hermitage or Chateauneuf du Pape (near Avignon). The vast majority of Côtes du Rhône wine is sold under the generic appellations, "Côtes du Rhône" or "Côtes du Rhone Villages". Côtes du Rhône wines are blended from several different grape varieties, including most notably Viognier, Syrah, and Grenache. Price-wise, Côtes du Rhône are often at the cheaper end of the "appellation contrôlée" range.

Côtitations sociales : social security and health insurance contributions, paid in France by both employers and employees. The levels are high, and add over 50% to basic wage costs in France; but they are still insufficient to pay for the cost of running France's very full social and health services.

Coupe de France : the French national football cup

Cour d'Appel. Appeals court

Cour d'Assise. Assize court, the major criminal courts, with judges and juries, in which people accused of serious crimes are judged and sentenced.

Cour de Cassation. The highest appeal court in France, equivalent in this respect to the House of Lords in the UK or the Supreme Court in the USA.

Cour des Comptes. Accounts court, or Public Auditor's Office. The mission of the Cour des Comptes is to audit the accounts of public bodies, notably the accounts of the state, of the Social Security system, and private bodies using public funds. The Cour des Comptes is independent of the government. In the regions, public accounts - for instance those of Departments or Universities - are audited by the Chambre Régional des Comptes.

Crédit Agricole: a semi cooperative bank, the biggest retail banking group in France, and the second largest in Europe. It is quoted on the Paris Stock Exchange, and on the New York stock exchange, and is a CAC 40 company. Crédit Agricole was founded in the nineteenth century to provide local banking facilities for France's millions of small farmers - a function that it still fills to this day. Today, the Crédit Agricole is made up of 39 autonomous cooperative regional banks (*caisses régionales*), which together have over 7,000 retail banking outlets in France. However it is also a major corporate player, with private investors as well as its co-operative owners, and owns, or has a major stake in, a dozen banks outside France. It also now owns LCL, the former Crédit Lyonnais.

Crédit Lyonnais - One of the big French retail banks. Once one of the biggest banks in France, the Crédit Lyonnais was a nationalised bank from 1945 to 1999. During the 1980s, the bank ran up massive debts due to bad loans and financial scandals, some of them involving subsidiaries and operations in the USA. The bank was saved from collapse by a massive rescue operation by the French state. In 2003, the

Crédit Lyonnais was bought by rival bank Crédit Agricole (see above), many of its activities were wound down, and its high-street banks began trading as LCL.

Crémant - a sparkling wine very similar to Champagne, but produced in a different area of France. Notably Crémant de Bourgogne, Crémant du Jura, and Crémant d'Alsace. these wines are generally produced in just the same way as Champagne, can be as good as ordinary Champagne, but are far cheaper because they do not have the same prestigious name.

Cresson, Edith (born 1934). Prime minister of France 1991-1992. The first (and only) woman to have been appointed Prime minister of France, Edith Cresson is also the shortest-serving prime minister of the Fifth Republic. As prime minister, she rapidly lost popularity, and led the Socialists to a resounding defeat in the 1992 regional elections. She was later appointed European commissioner, but resigned four years later amid allegations of corruption directed against her personally, and against the Santer commission, of which she was a member. In 2006, the European court of Justice found her guilty of favouritism during her time in office.

Croisette, la. The seaside boulevard at Cannes. The Cannes congress centre, which hosts the annual [Cannes Film Festival](#), is located on the Croisette, which stretches for about 1.5 miles along the shore of the Mediterranean.

CRS, Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité. The CRS are best known for their role as French riot police. This reputation was originally acquired in 1968, when they were used with great effect as frontline troops by the government in order to contain and repel protesting students and factory workers. They are regularly called out to supervise large street demonstrations, to protect public buildings, and to intervene the moment things get out of hand. Among their other jobs are the protection of government ministers, supporting other police forces when they are stretched, and undertaking motorcycle patrols on main roads.

Cru bourgeois region;; quality label given to some wines from the Bordeaux lower than a *Grand Cru* classification, but superior to the standard Appellation Contrôlée designation. for further details, see [wines](#) section.

CSA Comité Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel. The official watchdog overseeing the broadcast media in France

Cumul des mandats. Expression used to describe the cumulation, by a single politician, of a range of different representative functions, such as parliamentarian and mayor, or mayor and president of a regional council. The principle of combining different representative roles is deeply anchored in the French political tradition, where national politicians frequently built up their reputation and power bases in their local fiefdoms, and local politics were often in the hands of local "notables" with their fingers in many pies. . Jacques Chirac, for example, had a range of elected and ministerial jobs, and was at one time simultaneously député for the **Corrèze** department, President of the General council of Corrèze, and Mayor of Paris. Since the 1990's, there have been attempts to outlaw the practice of double mandates. Lionel Jospin forbade ministers in his government from being mayor at the same time, and this unwritten rule continued to be applied - more or less - until the end of the Chirac presidency. Since the start of the Sarkozy presidency, it has been enforced less stringently. According to a 2007 opinion poll for [Le Nouvel Observateur](#), 74% of French people disapprove of the principle of cumul des mandats. Reform of this aspect of French life would surely be appreciated by voters, but the principle is so well rooted in the French socio-political system, and so many decision-makers and advisors- of all political persuasions - have a vested interest in the system, that this is a reform that will likely prove very difficult to implement.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

D



What does *débrouillardise* mean? What was a *DEUG* ? Is a *député-maire* the deputy mayor, or something else? And where are the *DOM* ? Look no further, here are the answers to these and other questions concerning French words or names beginning with D

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	
R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

Photo top of page: iconic French car, the Citroen 2cv or **D**eux Chevaux... more usually grey than red.

Danone: Danone is the world's leading dairy company, and is known in the USA as Dannon. Its principal sectors of activity are today fresh milk products (yoghurts, desserts), baby food and mineral water. It distributes some of France's best known mineral waters, notably Volvic and Evian, and is the no. 2 worldwide in bottled mineral water. Danone became France's leading food-processing group in 1973, on the merger of Gervais-Danone and BSN. It is a **CAC 40** company.

Dassault: Groupe Dassault is a French industrial group consisting mainly of armaments and aviation companies, specialised in jet fighters, the most famous of which is the Mirage. It also owns Socpresse, publishers of the daily [Figaro](#) newspaper. The Dassault group is one of France's great family companies, founded by Marcel Dassault, now run by his son Serge Dassault.

DCRI Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur : New French Central Intelligence Agency, formed in 2008 from the merging of the two former rival intelligence agencies, the DST (*Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire*) and the RG (*Renseignements Généraux*).

De Gaulle , General Charles (adj. **Gaulliste**): 1890-1970. See under G: [Gaulle, General Charles de](#)

DEA, Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies. The pure research equivalent of the former DESS (see below), a former prerequisite for postgraduate students wishing to embark on a doctoral thesis. See [Higher education in France](#)

Deauville, Festival du film américain : popular annual film festival, founded in 1975, held each September in the northern coastal resort of Deauville

Debré, Michel: (1912-1996) Conservative politician, and right hand man of General de Gaulle. First prime minister (1959-1962) of the Fifth Republic. Debré was , with de Gaulle, one of the main authors of the constitution of the Fifth Republic.

Débrouillardise: "Se débrouiller" means to get by on your own; *débrouillardise* is a quality admired in France, the ability to get by, even when things are often lined up against you. It is also an ability to get through or round administrative red-tape.

Décathlon: large French international chain of sportswear and sports equipment stores.

Décentralisation : regionalisation, decentralisation, devolution of power from the central government to regional and departmental authorities. France has a long legacy as a centralised state, dating back many centuries; the centralised structure of power has survived numerous regime changes in since the French Revolution. It was not until the election of a Socialist government in 1981 that any major steps were taken to reduce the importance of Paris. The first *Loi de Décentralisation*, passed in 1982, transferred certain powers to the regions, and since then further powers have been devolved, including responsibility for lycées (though not the recruitment of their teachers), regional public transport services, and the management of certain social services. Regions are now governed by elected **conseils régionaux**, under the leadership of a Président de région.

Déclaration fiscale - tax return

Decrees. Much administrative and civil legislation in France is passed by means of decree, rather than being put through parliament.

See [politics and government](#).

Decrets. See **Decrees**.

Delanoë, Bertrand - Mayor of Paris from 2001 to 2014 . Delanoë is a popular member of the Socialist party

Delors, Jacques - A French catholic socialist politician, former President of the European Commission (1985-1995). Father of the leading French socialist politician Martine **Aubry**. Delors' socialist-catholic vision of European integration was strongly at odds with the "anglo-saxon/protestant" views of Margaret Thatcher, and the two leaders disagreed vehemently over many issues.

Demonstrations, (Fr. *Manifestations*) : Form of protest popular with students and trade unions, though less so than in the past.

Département : County. [Metropolitan](#) France is divided administratively into 96 Departments. The concept of the Department, as a territorial subdivision, has existed since the seventeenth century. The original list of 89 departments, numbered alphanumerically from A to Z, was fixed in 1860. Since then, seven new departments have been added. Department 90, the Territoire de Belfort, was made from the French-speaking part of southern **Alsace** in 1871, and Departments 91 to 95, the departments of the Greater Paris area, added in 1964. Department 20, **Corsica**, was divided into two in 1976. There are also four overseas departments, known as [DOM](#) (Départements d'Outre-Mer). The capital town of a department is known as the [Préfecture](#), and since 2015 Department are administered by an elected [Conseil Départemental](#) (which replaced the former Conseils généraux) Departments are grouped together to form larger units, known as [régions](#).

Départements d'outre Mer. See **DOM**

Député: Elected member of the French parliament, the Assemblée nationale. See [politics and government](#).

Député-maire. A député-maire is not the **mayor's** deputy. This expression is used to describe a person who occupies two representative functions, that of **député** and that of **mayor**. See **Cumul des mandats**.

DESS, Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures Spécialisées - phased out in 2004, the former principal French post-graduate degree, usually obtained at the end of five years of higher education, and equivalent to a **Masters**. The DESS, like its pure research equivalent, the **DEA**, has now ben replaced by the new Masters qualification.

DEUG - Diplôme d'Enseignement Universitaire Général: Certificate previously awarded for successful completion of the first two years of university study. The DEUG was phased out with the adoption by France of the "Bologna" diploma structure (known in France as LMD), for which the first higher education diploma is the [Licence](#) (equivalent of the BA), awarded after three years of study.

Deux Chevaux (2CV)..... Nickname, *la Deudeuche*. Iconic minimalist French car, (see also Citroën). The first models of this car were produced in 1938, but the war stopped the project. The first 2CVs went on sale in 1949, and the last production line was closed in 1990 – bringing to an end an incredible 41 years of production. The original 2CV, with its spongy suspension, was designed as an affordable car for small farmers (*paysans*) and workers, a car in which one could carry a basket of eggs to market over France's poorly surfaced or unsurfaced roads, and arrive with all the eggs intact. Over five million "Deux-Chevaux" were produced by Citroën over the years, in France or plants abroad. Those that remain today are collector's items.

Diagonale du vide, la : A.k.a. *Diagonale aride* : a large swathe of land running across France from northeast (the Meuse plain) to southwest (the central Pyrenees), via the southern Massif Central, where, for most of the twentieth century population was falling and the economy in decline, due to rural exodus. Since the start of the twenty-first century, the population in this area, covering some twenty departments, has at last begun to increase again, as a result of longer life-expectancy and of repopulation by emigrants from the cities and other parts of Europe.

Digestif : A small glass of liqueur or brandy traditionally drunk at the end of a good meal, particularly on a festive occasion. Popularly known as a *pousse-café*. The tradition is perhaps still strongest in rural France, where there are still people, known as *bouilleurs de cru*, who have the right to produce their own spirits from their own fruit – *calvados* from apples in Normandy, *prune* from plums or *kirsch* from cherries in eastern France, and *gnole* or *goutte* (from grapes) in the south. However, consumption of *digestifs* has fallen heavily in recent years, notably on account of drink-drive laws.

Directeur de Cabinet : the senior civil servant who, with the Minister, is in charge of running a government department or ministry. The French equivalent of a Permanent Secretary (Permanent under secretary of state) in a British government department. More generally, the salaried employee in charge of the cabinet (office) of a politician or elected representative..

District: term formerly used for groupings of local authorities, now generally replaced with "[communauté de communes](#)" (q.v.)

Do-do: or *dodo*. in children's language, a *do-do* is a sleep or a nap. *Faire dodo* means go to sleep.

DOM the *Départements d'Outre Mer*, French overseas departments, two in the Caribbean (**Guadeloupe** and **Martinique**), one in South America (**Guyane**), and one in the Indian Ocean (La **Réunion**). Administratively part of France, and therefore with elected representatives in the French parliament, these overseas departments benefit from many special regimes, notably fiscal advantages.

Droite, la: Generic term used to refer to the political right, or conservatives. French conservatism has in recent decades been rather different from conservatism in the UK and most other parts of Europe. Anchored in a patrician, nationalistic and literally 'conservative' mode, France's political right has long had a very ambivalent attitude to economic liberalism. Following in the tradition of General de **Gaulle**, who remains the point of reference for right-wing politicians in France to this day, *la Droite*, which has been in power for all but thirteen of the last fifty years, has stressed an attachment to existing traditions and institutions, and in so doing failed (along with left-wing counterparts) to modernise the nation and its economy.

Most significantly, many French conservatives have frequently taken pains to distance themselves from economic liberalism (See **libéralisme**). As recently as 2007, Jacques **Chirac** wrote, 'Liberalism will lead to the same failures and to the same excesses as Communism'

DS (Pronounced *Déesse*, i.e. "Goddess") See also Citroën. The top-of- the range model produced by car manufacturer Citroën from 1955 to 1975. When it first came out, the car, with its revolutionary aerodynamics and air suspension, was far ahead of its time. It was the perfect vehicle for cruising at unlimited speed on the very poorly-surfaced main roads of fifties and sixties France. It was said at the time that the

surfaces of French main roads would never improve, because all decision-makers rode round in DS, so never realised how bumpy the roads were for other drivers.

DUT : Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie, a two year university diploma, awarded to graduates of an IUT (Institut Universitaire de Technologie). See [higher education in France](#)



An A-Z Dictionary of France

E



What is an *Enarque* ? What happened to a ship called the *Erika* ? Is an *EURL* a type of aristocrat, or a type of firm? And what were the *Accords d'Evian* ? Look no further, here are the answers to these and other questions about French words or names beginning with E

E 111 former European health card, used by European Union citizens for [health cover in France](#) and other EU countries. E111 has now been replaced by the EHIC card.

Eau d'Evian, see **Evian** below

Ecole des Mines - A "[grande école](#)", one of France's prestigious engineering schools, founded by King Louis XVI in 1783; originally specialising in mines, it today trains experts in various fields of civil engineering. Its full name is the École Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Paris . See [Higher Education in France](#)

Ecole Maternelle - Kindergarten: France has a strong tradition of pre-school education, and Ecoles Maternelles are open to pupils from the ages of 2 to 6 (the start of compulsory education). About a third of French children start going to kindergarten at the age of 2, and almost all children attend école maternelle between the ages of 3 and 6.

Ecole Normale - Name formerly given to teacher training colleges in France; their main purpose was the training of future primary school teachers (instituteurs). Today future teachers are trained in [IUFM](#) - *Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres*.

Ecole Normale d'Administration, see **ENA**.

Ecole Normale Supérieure : Top French "grande école" in the field of arts and letters and sciences. See [Higher Education in France](#)

Ecole Primaire or **Ecole Élémentaire** : Primary school, for the education of pupils between the ages of 6 and 11. There are five classes. In some small rural primary schools, teachers may still take several classes together. For further details see [Primary & secondary education in France](#).

EDF - Electricité de France, the leading French power company. Formerly a nationalised utility, EDF is now a public company, in which the French government is the major shareholder. EDF has expanded its activities into many European countries, including Britain, though was very reluctant to give up its monopoly over the electricity distribution market in France. EDF is the second largest energy company in the world in terms of stock-market capitalization. In France, over 85% of the electricity produced by EDF comes from nuclear power generation.

Education nationale : the French state education system, and the largest employer in France. Teachers and administrative staff with tenured jobs in the state education system are classed as [fonctionnaires](#), or civil servants. Counting tenured employees and those with short-term contracts (*contractuels*), the EN has some 1.1 million employees, including about 850,000 teachers. The Education Nationale is administered centrally by the *MEN (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale)*, and on a regional basis through [Académies](#), each one presided over by a [Recteur](#).

EELV : Europe Ecologie Les Verts. Political movement / party that emerged between 2008 and 2010 when the Green Party expanded to form an alliance including other militant environmental groups that were until then outside politics. See [Les Verts](#)

Eglise Catholique: France is often described as a “Catholic” country; but this description is not technically true. Since 1905, there has been a strict separation of church and state in France, and France is officially a secular (*laïc*) republic. See [laïcité](#). Nevertheless, Catholicism remains the main religion of France to this day. In 1999, slightly over half the French population claimed to be Catholic, though only about 12% of the population are churchgoers.

There are 15 archbishoprics in the French Catholic church, plus the Catholic archdioceses of Strasbourg and Metz, which for historic reasons are directly dependent on the Vatican. Since the revolution, church buildings have belonged to the nation, and to this day their upkeep is the responsibility of local authorities. ► For more information see [Religion in France](#)

Eglise Réformée de France : the main French protestant church, of Calvinist inspiration. The ERF is closely associated with the other main Protestant church in France, the Lutheran EELF, Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne de France (French Lutheran Evangelical Church) which is particularly present in the area of Montbéliard, a Protestant stronghold in eastern France.

EHPAD : Residence for elderly people in need of care. Care home with medically trained staff. EHPADs can be run by local authorities or public bodies, private companies or non-profit associations. The cost of accommodation is paid by the family, and may be subsidised for those with insufficient resources. In 2019 43% of EHPADS were in the public sector, and the total number of people being cared for was just under 600,000. With the ageing of the population in France, the number of places available is expected to increase to over a million by 2050.

Eiffel Tower, see [Tour Eiffel](#)

Elitism : In spite of the national commitment to the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, France remains marked by traditions of elitism that are ingrained in the very fibre of society. The French Revolution was supposed to have done away with privileges and elites, and usher in an age of greater equality; in the event, it – and subsequent upheavals – changed the nature of the elites in France, without making a great impact on the underlying system. Indeed, the notion of ‘republican elites’ is one that was fundamental in the shaping of post-Revolutionary France.

In terms of local power, the role of local *notables* – important figures – remains strong. *Notables* frequently fulfil multiple roles in local administration and structures, sometimes combining these with elected positions on a regional or national scale, giving them and their close supporters a considerable degree of power. (See [Cumul des mandats](#)). They are frequently referred to as *les elites locales*. The process of devolution in France, set in motion in 1982, has had the effect of strengthening the power base of local elites.

The French education system, while offering a good quality non-selective education to all children at lower levels, is increasingly elitist towards the top, particularly when it comes to preparing for higher education. Many [classes préparatoires](#), particularly those preparing students for entrance to the top institutions of higher education, called **Grandes Ecoles**, are very selective, and the selection process – and for that matter the system itself – often disfavours students from humble or poorer backgrounds. The *Grandes Ecoles* themselves, tailor-made to the needs of the nation, train the future leaders and decision makers in specific fields of the public or private sector, producing very close networks of former students, that make the British concept of the “old-boy network” seem rather informal.

Places in the top *grandes écoles* and some other institutions are highly sought after, as graduates from these schools are seen in France as a sort of caste, membership of which is highly recommended, if not essential, for anyone wanting to reach the top. The classic example of this is the **ENA**, Ecole Normale d’Administration, the Grande Ecole designed to train top civil servants and future political leaders. In the corridors of French power, many if not most of the top positions are occupied by **Enarques**, graduates of the ENA. In 1967, Jean-Pierre Chevènement – himself an *Enarque*, and later to be Minister of the Interior under François Mitterrand – coined the word *Enarchie*, to define the French system of state elites.

As for business elites, a 2006 review in the Economist observed that they "often seem to owe more allegiance to the group from which they are drawn than to the international corporations they work for."

Elysée, Palais de l': Paris, official residence of the President of France, located on the Rue du Faubourg St.Honoré, near the Champs Elysées. Most of the weekly Cabinet meetings are held in this presidential palace, and it is from the presidential office that French presidents tend to make televised broadcasts to the nation. The annual presidential Garden Party is held in the gardens of the Elysée Palace on [Bastille Day](#).

Emmaüs, les Communautés d': Associations for the reinsertion of long-term unemployed and social misfits, founded by Abbé [Pierre](#), the Emmaüs Communities specialise in the collection and treatment of second-hand paraphernalia. Emmaüs centres will take almost anything, and either recycle it or else sell it; the centres are popular with bargain hunters and people looking for furniture and bric-à-brac at knockdown prices.

Emmental: a popular type of pressed cheese, made mainly in the east of France, in the [Franche Comté](#) and Lorraine regions. Very recognisable on account of the big round holes, Emmental is not an [appellation contrôlée cheese](#).

ENA, the Ecole Normale d'Administration, one of France's top "grandes écoles". Founded in 1945, the ENA was set up as a school, open to all, for the training of uncoming generations of *hauts fonctionnaires* (top civil servants) to run France's public sector. However the school also trains future leaders of industry, and many top French politicians, including four presidents, are alumni of the school. Originally located in Paris, the ENA is now in Strasbourg, the capital of [Alsace](#). The network of graduates, known as *Enarques*, is one of the cosiest and most influential old-boy (and old-girl) networks in France.

In 2019, responding to years of criticism that the ENA has outlived its function and is now perceived as an instrument for the benefit of the elite, President Macron, himself an alumnus, pledged to abolish it. No date has been set.

Enarque, Graduate of the Ecole Normale d'Administration. See ENA.

Engie : Until 2015 known as GDF-Suez, Engie is the world's third largest energy company, founded in 2008 from the merger of GDF and Suez. With a 35.7% stake, the French state is the largest single shareholder in the company. The company employs almost 200,000 people, almost half of them in France. It is the largest purchaser and distributor of gas in Europe. GDF-Suez is a CAC 40 company.

ENS : See **Ecole Normale Supérieure**

Eoliennes : Wind turbines, see **Parc Eolien**.

Epoisses Soft [cheese](#), made in northwest Burgundy

Equipe, l' France's leading daily sports newspaper, and one of the biggest-selling dailies in France.

Erignac, Claude, 1937-1998. French senior civil servant assassinated by Corsican nationalists in 1998. As [prefect](#) of the Corsica region, Erignac represented, for Corsican nationalists, a symbol of French colonial power. He was gunned down by Corsican extremists in Ajaccio one evening in February 1998, and is the most high-ranking victim of nationalist violence on the island. After a controversial investigation and trial, a group of nationalists were found guilty of murdering Erignac. One of the accused, Yvan Colonna, claimed his innocence, and went into hiding for four years, before being recaptured and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2009.

Erika Name of the Italian-managed Maltese-registered tanker, on charter to the French oil company Total-Fina-Elf, that ran aground and sank off the Brittany coast in 1999, causing one of France's largest oil spills and environmental disasters. At least 150,000 birds died as a result of the spillage of heavy oil, that affected beaches from the Charente to the Finistère.

Espace, The original European "monospace" vehicle, first produced in 1984 by [Renault](#). The initial concept for the Espace was actually conceived in the Rootes/Chrysler design facility in Coventry, England; this facility was associated with Chrysler's French subsidiary, Matra-Simca. When Chrysler sold their UK operations to Peugeot, the latter were not interested in the monospace project, so Matra teamed up with Renault, who eventually went ahead with the project and launched what has since become one of the company's flagship models.

ESSEC : École supérieure des sciences économiques et commerciales . One of France's world-class business schools, the ESSEC is based in Cergy Pontoise, in the suburbs of Paris. It has a branch in Singapore. Entry to ESSEC is highly selective. The school ranked 5th in the Financial Times world ranking of executive business schools for 2019

Est Républicain, l' the main daily newspaper in central eastern France, published in Nancy, in [Lorraine](#).

Est, Gare de l' Paris mailine railway terminus, serving central eastern France. Since 2008, and the opening of the TGV de l'est, the Gare de l'Est has become the fourth Paris mailine rail terminus offering TGV services. See [rail travel in France](#).

Estafette : The iconic French delivery van, produced by Renault from 1959 to 1980.

EURL - Entreprise Unipersonnelle à Responsabilité Limitée : type of French microcompany, a limited liability company formed by a single person, allowing an individual to benefit from a simple corporate structure without the complexities of creating a full company.

EUROPE 1 Popular private commercial radio station, currently specialising in news and talk. Originally set up in 1955 as a private radio broadcasting from the Saarland (Germany), at a time when broadcasting in France was a state monopoly, the station was soon brought under indirect government control when the Sofirad company took a controlling stake; but Europe 1 retained a degree of editorial independence that the official state broadcasters did not have. Today Europe 1 is again a private broadcaster, now controlled by the [Lagardère](#) group. In 2007, its pop music partner station **Europe 2** was renamed Virgin Radio, under a franchise agreement with the Virgin group.

Eurostar International high-speed train, running between London and Paris, and London and Brussels.

Evian, Accords d' Agreement, signed in 1962, putting an end to the Algerian war. The agreement, signed between the French government and the Algerian National Liberation Front, led to Algerian independence, while giving France the right to maintain a certain strategic presence in the country for 15 years. France's withdrawal from Algeria, after 130 years of colonial domination, was the subject of bitter argument in France, and France narrowly escaped falling into civil war over the issue. The Algerian crisis lasted from 1954 to 1962, and led in 1958 to the collapse of the Fourth Republic, and the establishment of the Fifth Republic under [General de Gaulle](#). It was de Gaulle who masterminded the package that achieved consensus at the Evian talks. Evian is a town in the French region of Rhone-Alpes, standing on the French shores of lake Geneva.

Evian, Eau d': Evian mineral water, reputed to have been filtered for centuries beneath the Alps, is the leading mineral water in France, and the world's leading export product in its field. Evian water has been bottled since 1826. The Evian bottling company is today part of the [Danone](#) group.

Express, l' Weekly independent French newsmagazine, founded in 1953 by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber and Françoise Giroud, on the model of the American *Time* magazine. Originally a centre-left magazine, l'Express moved to the centre right in the early 1980's. Many prominent French journalists and writers have at times been involved with L'Express; they include Jean Paul [Sartre](#), Raymond Aron and Christine [Ockrent](#).

Extremism : While extremist and populist parties have flourished in the twenty-first century in many developed nations, France has long been a country with a surprising level of tolerance of extremism. For instance, until the rise of the Socialists in the 1970s, the Communist Party was the major party of the left in France. After its popularity faded in the 1980s and 1990s, many French voters moved their sympathies to other parties at the extremes of the political spectrum, left-wing parties on the left, and the surging [Front National](#) on the right. In the first round of the 2002 Presidential elections, virtually a third of all votes cast went to an extremist candidate, on a turnout of 71% of the electorate. Almost 20% of votes went to the Front National or ex-FN candidates, and 13.81% was split among four trotskyist or communist candidates. While this can be seen in part as a form of protest vote, or lack of confidence in mainstream political parties, it also illustrates the degree to which France remains a polarised society.

In the first round of the 2015 Regional elections, the FN took 27.73% of the vote, more than any other party.

Extremism has long historic roots in France, going back to absolutism and the collaboration of the [Vichy régime](#) on the one hand, and the excesses of the French Revolution on the other.

Although the French Revolution degenerated into the vicious blood-letting of la Terreur (1792-1794) with its state-sponsored assassinations and all the trappings of a modern fascist state, the Revolution remains the founding event of modern France, and support for mass protest and street violence, born out of memories of the barricades of 1798, remains strong to this day, a factor that has allowed parties of the far left and the far right to acquire credibility and popular support more easily than in most other democratic states.

However the success of extremist parties in 21st century France can also be attributed to the fact that mainstream political parties on the left and on the right have done their bit to strengthen their credibility. Conservative parties have a long history of assimilating centre-left and socialist parties with the Communists and other far-left parties, while the Socialists have persistently sought to make political capital by portraying the mainstream conservative parties as the natural bedfellows of the far right. The paradoxical result was to give credence and respectability to extremist parties and leaders such as Jean Marie **Le Pen** of the National Front, or Arlette [Laguiller](#) of **Lutte Ouvrière**.

Furthermore, in their keenness to demonstrate even-handedness, French television stations and the media have persistently given coverage to charismatic politicians of the left and the right, turning people such as Le Pen, Laguiller or more recently Olivier [Besancenot](#), and the new generations of Le Pens, into popular chat-show guests.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

F



Who is **François Fillon** ? What was the **Front Populaire** ? What does one do with a **feuille de soins** ? And when was the **Front National** set up ? Look no further, here are concise definitions of these and other words and names beginning with F

Fabius, Laurent (Adj. *Fabiusien*) Born 1946. - Former socialist Prime Minister of France (1984-1986) during the first Mitterrand presidency. Graduate of the **ENA (Ecole Normale d'Administration)**. Fabius more recently came to much public attention by being the leading proponent of the victorious "no" vote in the French referendum on the European Constitution in 2005. He returned to front-line politics in 2012, becoming French foreign Secretary in the Hollande administration. In 2016 he stood down, in order to take up the post of President of the French **Constitutional Council**.

Fac : *Faculté* : name commonly used to define parts of French universities. See **UFR**.

FCPE : The FCPE, or *Fédération des Conseils de Parents d'Elève*, is the biggest parents' association in the French school system, with 325,000 members (2008). Founded in 1947 by the teachers' unions, the FCPE has the reputation of being instrumentalised by teachers for their own advantage in decision-making bodies such as school councils where parent's associations have a statutory place. In political terms, the FCPE is left of centre. It's main rival is the PEEP, reputed to be a conservative parent's association. In recent years, both large associations have lost ground to independent local parent's associations. The FCPE is sometimes known as the *Fédération Cornec*, after the name of a very long-standing chairman Jean Cornec (1956-1980).

Fémina, an annual literary prize, awarded to a female writer. see **Prix littéraires**.

Fête de la Musique (Nuit de la musique) : Music night, the night of the summer solstice, or longest day, 21st June. The first *fête de la musique* took place in 1982, and the even was made official the following year by culture minister Jack Lang. Since then, the idea has been copied by over 100 countries worldwide. Originally, the idea was that on the evening of the longest day, anyone who wanted could make music anywhere in the streets until the early hours of the morning. That is how it was in the beginning, and except in specially organised events, most of the music was from amateurs, with minimal amplification. More recently, in many towns, organisation of the *Fête de la Musique* has been largely taken over or coordinated by councils, and the best places have been allotted to rock groups – to the detriment of other less noisy musicians. Following years of complaints from town-centre residents, most councils have now limited the volume at which bands can play, and fixed a shut-down time, often 1 a.m.

Fête patronale : a tradition that is often kept up in rural parts of France. Festivities organised on the occasion of the annual patron saint's day of the village church. Depending on the organisers, fêtes patronales can be anything from a **vin d'honneur** or a meal in the village hall (*salle des fêtes*) or a restaurant, to a full blown village fête or dance.

Feuille de Soins: Form delivered after a visit to the doctor, dentist or the hospital, indicating the cost and details of treatment and/or the cost of medicine prescribed and brought from a chemists shop. For people who do not have a French health insurance card (**Carte Vitale**), this form must be completed then returned to the **Caisse Primaire** to claim reimbursement.

Fifth Republic: See **Cinquième république**.

Figaro, le. One of the main [French daily newspapers](#), generally conservative in outlook. It is perhaps the nearest French equivalent to Britain's Daily Telegraph. Founded in 1826, it is the oldest of the French dailies. Le Figaro currently belongs to Socopresse, a subsidiary of the [Dassault](#) group of companies.

Fillon, François : Born 1954. Prime minister of France 2007-2012 - The first prime minister of the first [Sarkozy](#) presidency. François Fillon, a conservative politician, was minister of social affairs, and then minister of education in the government of Jean Pierre [Raffarin](#), during the second [Chirac](#) presidency. In this time, he acquired the reputation of a reformer, pushing through major reforms of the education system and the retirement system. He is an anglophile, and has a British wife, Penelope. After winning the primaries for the conservative Les Républicains party prior to the 2017 presidential election, and then becoming the front-runner to win, Fillon was subsequently disgraced following accusations that he had had his wife handsomely paid out of public funds for a fictitious job. He refused to withdraw and hand the conservative candidacy to someone else, but failed to make it through to the second round of the election. See more under [Presidential elections 2017](#)

Flanby : nickname for François Hollande, president of France since 2012. Origin uncertain. Flanby is the brand name of an industrially produced milk caramel pudding, sold in pots.

Fleur-de-lys : literally meaning "flower of the lily", the fleur-de-lys is a heraldic emblem traditionally associated with France. While recognised as a symbol of France, it is not used as an emblem of modern republican France, since for many people in France it is seen as a symbol of the "*ancien régime*" or the monarchy. Notwithstanding, fleurs-de-lys do feature in the coats of arms of a number of French towns and cities, including Paris, Blois, Lyon, Rheims, Poitiers, Limoges, Saint-Denis and in the coats of arms of many French departments and towns - though rarely in the more modern municipal logos. One modern French region, Burgundy, includes fleur-de-lys in its contemporary logo. The symbol has survived more strongly outside France, where it appears for instance in the official flag of Quebec and in that of the Acadiana region of Louisiana.

Flute: literally meaning a flute, the word *flute* is used to describe a standard 500 gramme loaf of white bread, usually the same length, but twice as thick, as a **baguette**.

FN - See Front National below

FO Force Ouvrière, one of the biggest trade unions in France, traditionally less militant and more consensual than the [CGT](#).

Foie gras: fattened goose-liver or duck-liver paté. Foie gras, the most famous of which is produced in the Périgord region, is an expensive delicacy. It is produced from the livers of geese or ducks, which have been force-fed (*gavés*) with too much grain, before slaughter, in order to increase the size of the liver. The technique has been used for over 4000 years, but has recently been criticised on the grounds of animal cruelty, and a number of countries have banned the process. France produces almost 80% of the world's foie gras, but also imports it. Paté de foie gras is paté containing at least 50% of foie gras.

Fonction Publique, la (see also **Haut Fonctionnaire**) The French civil service. Tenured state employees - all 1.75 million of them, including qualified teachers in the state education system - are called **fonctionnaires**; non-tenured employees are called "*agents de la fonction publique*" or "*contractuels*". In 2005, state employees represented 22% of the workforce in France, more than in any other large European country. Recruitment, promotion and pension rights are all ordered according to arcane and complex rules, which successive governments have talked of modifying, though to little effect. President Sarkozy promised major reforms of the French civil service, starting with a slimming down of the number of state employees, largely through the non-replacement of 50% of retiring civil servants. Jobs in the public sector have always been much sought after in France, notably on account of the job security of the tenured and other

essential posts, and good retirement pension schemes. Tenured *fonctionnaires* have a job for life, and it is very unusual for a *fonctionnaire* to lose his job; this sanction is normally only applied in cases of serious professional misconduct. Within France, there is occasional animosity from private-sector workers towards *fonctionnaires*, who are sometimes projected by the media as having a sheltered and relaxed working life - notably when there are public sector strikes.

Fonctionnaire, see **Fonction Publique**

Fontainebleau, château de - magnificent renaissance château built for François 1st, some 40 km. south of Paris.

Foreign Legion, see [Légion étrangère](#)

Fos sur Mer Principal petrochemical port on France's Mediterranean coast, Fos is a small town at the entrance to the inland Etang de Berre.

Forests. 26% of the surface area of France is now covered by forest, the French forest being the third most extensive in Europe after Sweden and Finland. The proportion of France covered by forest has doubled in the past 200 years. The largest single forested area in France is the Forêt des **Landes**, between **Bordeaux** and Biarritz, one of the largest pine forests in Europe. In upland France, notably in the Massif Central, the **Alps**, the **Jura**, the **Vosges** and the **Ardennes**, most forests are coniferous, with extensive areas of spruce. However the [Franche Comté](#) region of eastern France has Europe's most extensive area of deciduous forest, including the large Forêt de Chaux.

Formule 1 - renamed **F1** in 2007 Budget one-star hotel chain present throughout France, offering rooms at very competitive prices. The hotels offer clean but very basic accommodation, with automated checkin. They are usually sited beside main roads, or at motorway exits. The Formule 1 chain belongs to the [Accor](#) group.

Fos sur Mer Principal petrochemical port on France's Mediterranean coast, Fos is a small town at the entrance to the inland Etang de Berre.

Fourme A word that etymologically just means "cheese", or the mould in which the cheese is produced. The best known "fourme" is Fourme d'Ambert, a nutty-flavoured mild [blue cheese](#) from the **Massif Central**.

Franc français, le: The French national currency, used from 1795 to 2002, when it was replaced by the Euro. One Euro replaced 6.5596 French Francs. In the late twentieth century, the Franc was sometimes referred to as the *nouveau franc*, following a realignment of the French currency in 1960, when 100 Old Francs (or *anciens francs*) became worth 1 *nouveau franc*. Until the Franc was replaced by the Euro, there were still some old people in France who thought in terms of Old Francs. Branches of the **Banque de France** continued to accept and exchange the last-used French Franc banknotes until February 2012.

France 2 The main French public television channel, previously known as Antenne 2, operated by France Télévisions.

France 3 The network of French regional TV stations operated by the public television corporation France Télévisions.

France Bleu The name of the public regional radio stations in France. Example *France Bleu Auvergne* is the public regional radio station for the Auvergne region.

France Dimanche the biggest selling of France's "people" magazines, France Dimanche is a colourful weekly, published each Friday. It is mainly concerned with the lives of the glitterati, showbiz, and public figures. Its circulation is over 480,000, and it is published by the **Hachette** group

France Insoumise. Hard left political party founded in 2016 by former Socialist Jean-Luc Mélenchon. In the 2017 general elections, La France Insoumise won 17 seats in the French National Assembly

France Soir : Former evening paper, published in Paris. At one time, France Soir was France's biggest evening newspaper, with a circulation of over a million. After a chequered history and several changes of ownership, it finally ceased publication in 2011, remaining as an Internet-only newspaper until going out of business in mid 2012.

France Télécom Now trading as [Orange](#) (qv), France Télécom was the state telecommunications company in France, responsible for the upkeep of the national telephone and telecommunications network . Privatised in 1998 by Lionel [Jospin's](#) socialist government, it remains by far the largest landline and mobile telecoms operator in France

France Télévisions : The French state television service, and operator of the France 2 and France 3 channels (see above). France Télévisions also runs [RFO](#) and France 5, as well as the digital TV channel France 4 and a growing number of cable channels. It is joint owner of the Franco-German TV channel Arte.

France: see [Facts and Figures](#)

Franche-Comté Largely hilly or mountainous former [region in central eastern France](#), just north of Switzerland. Capital Besançon. Franche-Comté, now a part of the Franche-Comté-Bourgogne region, is made up of four departments, the Haute-Saône in the north, the Jura in the southwest, the Doubs in the centre, and the small Territoire de Belfort in the north. At the end of the 20th century, it was the region with the highest proportion of the population employed in industry; this was due to its position as a largely rural region, with a low population density, containing one major industrial conurbation, the Belfort-Montbéliard area - home to two large industrial companies, Peugeot and Alstom, and to many smaller industrial companies. Today, apart from Peugeot cars and TGVs, the region is renowned for its dairy products and small components .

François, Claude - popular sixties and seventies French pop idol, who died in his prime by electrocuting himself in the bath. His female backup singers were known as the *Claudettes*.

Franquette, à la bonne - To eat *à la bonne franquette* means to eat in simple but classic French style, at home or in a restaurant.

Free.fr : The second biggest French Internet service provider after Orange (France Télécom), Free has been a pioneer in the world of Internet since its launch in 1999. It was one of the first ISPs to offer Internet dial-up access without the use of a premium rate number, and one of the first to offer [ADSL](#) broadband. If not the cheapest, Free has persistently offered Internet packages at very competitive rates; in 2003 it was the first ISP to include free national telephone services by VoIP. Free international calls began in 2005, as did free television for subscribers with unbundled access. In 2019, about 3.2 million customers were using Free's broadband packages, representing a market share of slightly around 23%. Free is traded on the Paris stock exchange under the name of its parent company Iliad SA.

French Antarctic Territories: collection of small islands in the far south Pacific, and a section of the Antarctic continent, mostly used for scientific research. Total population about 150 inhabitants.

French Polynesia : French overseas territory in the south Pacific, including Tahiti.

Front National, FN : Extreme right-wing and xenophobic political party, founded by Jean Marie [Le Pen](#) in 1972. The party is strongly Eurosceptic, anti-immigration, and traditionalist; party members, including Le Pen, have been prosecuted for racist remarks, negationism, and the downplaying of war-crimes. Current leader (2016) Marine Le Pen.

The Front National has been a significant force in French politics since the 1980's, particularly where they have been aided by proportional representation. They won 10 seats at the European Parliament in 1984, and then 35 seats in the French general election of 1986, after François [Mitterrand](#) introduced a degree of proportional representation into the voting system. PR was quickly dropped again

after this, and the FN has never since had more than a single **Député**. However, in European elections, where PR has remained, the FN has continued to pick up seats, with 7 in the 2004 election.

In 1995, the Front National won municipal elections in three towns in the south of France, Orange, Vitrolles and Marignane, in "triangular" second rounds for which neither the socialists (**PS**) nor the main conservative party would withdraw their candidates.

Perhaps the FN's most visible success was that of its leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, in the 2002 Presidential election, when he obtained second place in the first round, thus securing a place in the runoff. It is interesting to note that in this second round, which was a massive victory for Jacques **Chirac**, le Pen took less than 1% more of the vote than in the first round.

The high profile of the FN in French politics surprises many foreign observers, but it is not really a surprise in a country with a fragmented party political structure. France's biggest mainstream political parties have a tradition of instrumentalising whatever means possible in order to damage their opponents, and for a long time French left-wing parties have sought to portray the *Front National* as the natural ally of other conservative parties. Yet by blurring the distinction between this far right party other mainstream conservative parties, they paradoxically helped to legitimise the FN. Mitterrand's introduction of PR into the voting system for general elections in 1984, which propelled the FN into the limelight, was actually intended to stop the mainstream conservative parties from winning. The policy backfired, since the conservatives won anyway, and the FN obtained its own "group" in the French parliament.

Following a slight decline when the party lost voters to other right-wing parties, and had to sell off its flagship headquarters building in Neuilly-sur-Seine, in order to pay its debts, the FN has revived under the leadership of its new president Marine Le Pen, the daughter of founder Jean-Marie Le Pen. In the 2015 regional elections, it garnered the largest share of the popular vote in the first round of voting, and came close to winning control of at least three regions, Nord-Picardie, Grand Est and PACA. However the withdrawal of the Socialists from the second round in Nord-Picardie and PACA, and tactical voting in the Grand Est prevented the FN getting into power in any region..

In 2018, under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the Front National changed its name to **Rassemblement National**. See [Political Parties in France](#)

Front Populaire (Popular Front) : an alliance of French left-wing parties prior to the Second World War. In power from 1936 to 1938, but most significantly from 1936 to 1937, under the leadership of Leon Blum, the Popular Front introduced important new labour laws, including the right to strike, two week's annual paid holiday for all, and collective bargaining.

Front républicain : term used to describe the unofficial alliance of voters from the traditional parties, combining to defeat **Front National** candidates when these make it through to the second round of an election. It is a classic example of successful tactical voting, whereby for instance many socialist voters vote for the conservative candidate in a runoff between a conservative and an FN candidate, rather than abstaining, and conservative voters vote for the left-wing candidate in the event of a runoff between a left-wing candidate and a National Front candidate.

Futuroscope: future-oriented and modernistic theme park and technology centre, just north of Poitiers.



A Dictionary of France

G



What does GDF stand for ? What was the Gaspi ? Who are the Gilets Jaunes? What is the function of the Garde des sceaux ?

And when did **General de Gaulle** step down from power ? Look no further, here are the answers to these and other questions about French words or names beginning with **G**

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>I</u>
<u>J</u>	<u>K</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>Q</u>	
<u>R</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>V</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Z</u>

Photo top of page: the Pont du **Gard**

Gamma: From its founding in 1966, the Agence Gamma rapidly established itself as the leading French independent photo agency, specialising in news and reporting. Its position was undermined by the digital revolution, and the development of tabloid / people journalism, and at the end of the 1990's the agency was taken over by France's media giant Hachette-Filipacchi Media

Garabit, Viaduc de. Perhaps the most impressive French railway viaduct of the nineteenth century, designed by Gustave **Eiffel**. The Viaduct crosses the deep valley of the river Truyère in the **Cantal** department in [Auvergne](#), at an altitude of approximately 1000 metres. The bridge can be viewed from a purpose-built visitor centre beside the A75 motorway

Gard, Pont du. One of the most famous surviving Roman aqueducts, located in the Gard Department, near Nîmes, in the [Languedoc region](#) of France.

Garde des Sceaux : the Guardian of the Seals, the official title of the French Minister of Justice. This medieval title is still used today, since the official seal of the French republic is kept in the office of the Minister of Justice.

Gaspi, le Cartoon figure that became well known in the nineteen seventies. The Gaspi, from the French verb *gaspiller*, to waste, was a sort of gremlin whose main joy in life was to waste energy, particularly petrol or other forms of fuel. Government campaigns encouraged citizens to 'Chasser le gaspi', i.e. to avoid wastage.

Gauche, la The political left - word commonly used to designate the whole spectrum of politics anywhere to the left of centre, from moderate socialism to the far left (*extrême gauche*). A term used either with pride or pejoratively, depending on the standpoint of the user.

Gauche Caviar - the French equivalent of "Champagne socialism" or "armchair socialism" ; pejorative term used to describe people professing left-wing opinions that are somewhat in contradiction with their own lifestyle.

Gaulle , General Charles de (Derivatives. **Gaulliste**, a follower of de Gaulle, and **gaullien**, in the manner of De Gaulle) : 1890-1970. Prime minister 1944-1946, President 1958-1969.

De Gaulle was without doubt the most influential French politician of the twentieth century. Leader of the Free French forces in World War 2,

General de Gaulle went on to become the instigator, and the first president, of France's fifth republic. He oversaw French decolonisation of Algeria and other colonies, but was also a strong nationalist, who believed in France's independent nuclear deterrent, and withdrew France from NATO's military command in a move to affirm France's independence with regard notably to the USA. He was one of the leading proponents of the European Economic Community, the EEC, precursor of the European Union, but memorably blocked Britain's application for membership in 1960, considering that Britain was too aligned with the USA.

A firm believer in strong central power, he designed the constitution of the **Fifth Republic** to give very great powers to the President (far greater than in any other major western democracy), leaving the French Parliament as second fiddle. He also sought to model the European Community in the same way, concentrating power in the hands of the Commission, and opposing the extension of the powers of the European Parliament.

Notwithstanding, de Gaulle remains an iconic figure in the life of modern France, and a point of reference for politicians, notably those on the right. For over thirty years, French conservative political parties have vied with each other to portray themselves as the true bearers of Gaullist values; but with the passing of time, de Gaulle's influence on French politics, and the emblematic value of his name, are declining. The modern **UMP** party, the party of President Sarkozy, may be descended in direct lineage from de Gaulle's **RFP** and **UDR** parties, and may define itself as being "gaullist", but the meaning of the word, in that case, has changed.

Gauloises: the archetypal French cigarette, Gauloises were once the most widely smoked brand of cigarette in France, the preferred cigarette of 1960's and 1970's icons such as Jean-Paul Sartre or Serge Gainsbourg. They were the most popular of the French brands of "brown" tobacco (see **Tabac brun**) cigarettes, at a time when less than 20% of French smokers preferred blondes - cigarettes with light Virginia-style tobacco. The production of Gauloises cigarettes in France ceased in 2005.

Gaz de France (GDF) - the former state-owned French gas company. The company was privatized in 2005 and subsequently merged with Suez to form GDF-Suez, since renamed **Engie**

GDF-Suez : A CAC 40 company now known as **Engie** (q.v.).

Géant - One of the big hypermarket chains in France, part of the Casino group of retail outlets.

Gendarmerie (see also **police**). One of the two main branches of the police in France, the *Gendarmerie* is a national police force, responsible notably for policing the French road network, small towns and rural areas. It is also responsible for civil protection duties. Technically, the *Gendarmerie* is one of the French armed services. The policing of towns and cities is the responsibility of the *Police Nationale*, a different service.

Gilets jaunes - The Gilets Jaunes, or Yellow Vests were a populist protest movement that sprung up in France in October 2018. At the outset the movement was triggered by increases in fuel prices. Thousands of men and women, particularly in rural France and provincial cities, donned fluorescent yellow hi-viz vests, and occupied various strategic points on France's road network, causing minor disruption for a few days. In November the movement escalated with the organisation of weekly protest marches each Saturday, notably in Paris. The first few of these attracted over 100,000 demonstrators, and degenerated into the worst street violence in Paris since 1968.

In an attempt to calm the situation, President Macron organised a national consultation on the state of France and its problems. Among the paradoxical outcomes of this was that people were demanding on the one hand more and better public services, but on the other hand less taxation.

The Yellow Vest movement morphed into a general anti-establishment protest against perceived elites and against the government of President Macron, and the weekly protest marches, particularly in Paris, drew in violent extremists from the ultra left and ultra right, intent on causing mayhem. During these and other smaller protests elsewhere in France, at least ten people were killed, notably due to traffic

accidents.

Weekly Saturday protests continued until the middle of 2019, in Paris and here and there in different French cities, with the number of participants slowly dwindling. By mid-May the number of Saturday demonstrators had fallen to around 15,000 in the whole of France, and popular support for the movement had dropped off.

The Gilets Jaunes fielded candidates in the European Parliamentary Elections of May 2019, but gathered only just over 1% of votes between them.

By autumn 2019, weekly presence at Gilets Jaunes events throughout France had fallen to well below 10,000, mostly left-wing, anarchist or right-wing militants

Giscard d'Estaing, Valéry (adj. Giscardien) - Born 1926: President of France from 1974 to 1981. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing succeeded Georges Pompidou as French president, thereby putting an end to 16 years of Gaullist presidency. Though a conservative, Giscard was from the UDF, the centre right party in the conservative coalition of the time.

On becoming president, Giscard promised change after a decade and a half of Gaullist rule: more Atlanticist and pro-European than previous presidents, he nevertheless failed to embody the change that many people wanted, and was not reelected for a second term. He tried to give the French presidency more popular appeal than it previously enjoyed, and make it seem closer to ordinary Frenchmen, but his changes were more symbolic than real, and included walking down the Champs Élysées in a sweater rather than a suit, and inviting himself to dinner with ordinary French families from time to time.

After his defeat at the 1981 Presidential election, Giscard returned to politics as an ordinary *Député* (MP), and also became strongly involved in local politics in his region, the [Auvergne](#), becoming President of the Regional Council from 1986 to 2004.

Gîte d'étape - fairly simple overnight accommodation for hikers and trekkers.

Gîte équestre - the same as a gîte d'étape, but providing stabling and facilities for horses.

Gîte. A [self-catering holiday home](#) or apartment, generally run by the owners. Gîtes can vary massively in quality, from small cramped studios in Alpine resorts or seaside developments, to luxurious small châteaux in the midst of spacious parks. As owners are free to fix their own rates, the cost is not always a guide to the quality of a gîte on offer - much depending on location, local facilities and the local market.

However very cheap gîtes tend to offer very basic facilities or suffer from other disadvantages that may not be evident from tourist brochures or information made available to prospective customers. See also **Gîte d'Etape**, **Gîtes de France**, **Gîte Equestre**.

Gîtes de France A national though not official organisation that registers and classifies **gîtes**, and also publishes an annual register and offers a centralised booking service. Registration of gîtes with Gîtes de France is optional and also fee-paying, and the Gites de France guide is thus, contrary to an "**idée reçue**", in no way a complete guide to holiday property available.

Goncourt, Le Prix : The most famous of all French annual literary prizes, established in the nineteenth century. See Prix littéraires

Grand Canal, le - A proposed ship canal from the Rhine to the Rhone, via the valley of the river Doubs. The project caused bitter opposition from ecologists and environmentalists, and was finally shelved in 1995. Despite this, some conservative politicians and business interests along the projected route of the canal still hope to see the project go through.

Grand cru - top classification of Bordeaux [wines](#). Also used for the top wines from Burgundy and Alsace. The classification of Grands crus in the Bordeaux area was first established over 150 years ago, in 1855, and is divided into five levels, from Premier cru to Cinquième cru.

Grandes Ecoles: The French higher education system is different from that of other developed countries, and the pinnacle of the system is represented not by universities, but by classically French institutions known as "*Grandes Ecoles*". Unlike most university departments, which are open to all students with a relevant baccalaureate, *Grandes Ecoles* operate a highly competitive selection process. The classic way to train for these competitive entrance exams (**concours**) is to take two years' extra classes, known as **Classes Préparatoires**, in Lycée, after the **Baccalaureate**. See [higher education in France](#).

Grands ensembles : Housing projects, large tower block developments of social housing, usually in the suburbs.
See **ZUP** and *les Banlieues*.

Grenelle. The name of a boulevard in Paris, on which is situated the French Ministry of Labour. In 1968, at the height of the "events", talks were held in the Ministry between the labour unions and the government, to hammer out an agreement which would end the strikes and strife. Agreement was reached, but the "*Accords de Grenelle*" were never signed, as they were rejected by workers on the shop floor, and three days later the tide turned in favour of General de Gaulle, leading to the end of the social crisis.

Grenelle de l'Environnement : major gathering called by Nicolas Sarkozy shortly after his election as President in 2007, designed to establish a road map for the greening of French government policy. The initial gathering brought together politicians, civil servants, business and the representatives of the main environmental lobbies. Since then, the Grenelle de l'Environnement has become an ongoing forum for debate on the adaptation of government policy to environmental imperatives. The main sectors concerned are building regulations, town and country planning, transport, energy, biodiversity, water resources and agriculture.

Grèves : Strikes, see under **Conflits sociaux**.

Gruyère, best known as a cheese from Switzerland, Gruyère has been a Swiss Appellation Contrôlée (AOC) cheese since 2001. It was designated as an AOC cheese in France too, in 2007; however while the quality criteria for the production of Gruyère in France are strict, the area of production is huge, stretching from the Alps to parts of Burgundy, and Lorraine.

Guadeloupe - French overseas department (DOM) in the Caribbean.

Guides verts, Les : Popular tourist guidebooks to the regions of France, published by Michelin.

Guignols de l'Info Satirical TV current affairs programme, featuring puppets, inspired by Spitting Images. the programme is credited with having an undue influence on voter behaviour.

Guyane - French overseas territory on the south American mainland.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

H



What does the word *l'hexagone* often mean ? Who is *Johnny Halliday* ? Why would you not want to book a night in the *hotel des impots* ?

And what happened on the *huit mai* ? Here are the answers to these and other questions about French words or names beginning with H.

Hachette : Publishing company, today, as *Hachette Livre*, part of France's biggest media and publishing group, the Lagardère group. Hachette is the largest, and one of the oldest, book publishers in France. The company was founded in 1824 and today publishes some of France's best-known imprints, including Grasset, Hatier and Larousse. Hachette is also a major international publisher, and the second largest publisher in the UK, where it owns Chambers, Cassel, Hamlyn and a number of other publishers.

Hachette-Filipacchi Médias: The magazine, newspaper and audio-visual publishing branch of the **Lagardère** publishing empire. HFM publishes a significant number of France's most popular magazines, including **Elle**, **France Dimanche**, **Paris Match** and **Télé 7 Jours**; it also owns two regional dailies in the south of France, **Nice Matin** and *La Provence*, as well as the photo agencies **Gamma** and **Rapho**.

Halliday, Johnny : 1943 - 2017. Iconic French rocker, who first came to fame in the early sixties as the French answer to Elvis. Though essentially a singer of rock 'n' roll, Johnny - real name Jean-Philippe Smet - evolved like a chameleon through changing fashions and modes in music, remaining one of France's most popular singers through five decades. Born in Paris, he took his name Halliday from an American second cousin who was a variety artist. Lee Halliday helped young Jean-Philippe, whom he called Johnny, onto the first rungs of the showbiz ladder, and also introduced him to the music of the young Elvis Presley, a rising sensation in the USA who was unknown at the time in France. There followed a career spanning more than half a century, during which Johnny was the face and the voice of rock 'n' roll in France. He officially announced his retirement in 2007, though was still doing the occasional concert and recording new material almost up until his death. He died in 2017, leaving a legal wrangle over his considerable estate, between his children and his fifth wife Laeticia

Halte-garderie : popular form of creche, providing day-care for infants until they can have a place at kindergarten (*école maternelle*).

Harkis, les : In France, the term Harki is used to define Moslem Algerians who, during the Algerian war of independence, fought *with* the French army against the independentists. At the end of the war in 1962, and although the French tried to stop their exodus, about 90,000 Harkis managed to escape to France. Many of the thousands who remained in Algeria were massacred. In France, the situation of the Harkis was for many years brushed under the carpet. Thousands of Harki families were accommodated for years in internment camps and forestry camps, the most notorious of these being the Camp Joffre, near Perpignan. It was not until the 1990s that the French government began to officially recognise the injustices done to the Harkis; most recently, in 2007, President Sarkozy announced further measures in favour of Harki families, but stopped short of recognising any French responsibility for the fate suffered by Harkis after the war.

Haut fonctionnaire (see also **Fonction Publique**) : Senior civil servant, person occupying a senior post in the French public administration or in the corridors of power.

HEC : The *Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales*, a grande école located in Paris, is France's top business school. Founded in 1881, it is now (since 2008) part of a larger organisation called "Paris Tech". HEC is run by the Paris Chamber of commerce (see **CCI**), and is reputed

as one of the best business schools in the world, indeed classed top in the Financial Times European business schools league table in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

HEC offers 380 places per year in its first year of study, and with almost 4,000 candidates per year is the Grande école with the most competitive entry. The degree course, which includes at least 20 weeks abroad, and an internship, lasts 3 years, meaning effectively that most students do not graduate until five years after their baccalaureate (2 years of *prépa* to prepare for entry, then 3 years of HEC once accepted). HEC also offers MBA qualifications.

Hersant, Robert : (1920 - 1996) Hersant was the greatest press baron, or newspaper magnate, in France in the second half of the twentieth century. During the Second World War, Hersant collaborated openly with the Nazis and with the **Vichy** Régime, a collaboration for which he was condemned post war to ten years' national indignity. However, following the 1952 amnesty, he launched into a career both as a press baron and as a politician. At the peak of its expansion, Hersant's press empire controlled 38% of France's national press, and 26% of the regional press; among the flagship titles owned by Hersant were the daily **Le Figaro**, and the daily evening newspaper **France Soir**, two of France's best-selling newspapers. Although he was first elected to the French parliament as a socialist, Hersant went on to sit as a centrist conservative in Valéry **Giscard d'Estaing's** centre right **UDF** party.

Héxagone, l' . The Hexagon, a name frequently used to describe continental France, normally including **Corsica**. The name stems from the vaguely hexagonal shape of France. Consequently, the adjective *héxagonal* is sometimes used with the meaning of *French*.

Hollande, François : born 1954. President of France (2012 - 2017) Candidate of the French Socialist Party for the 2012 presidential election, he ousted incumbent president Nicolas Sarkozy in a closely fought runoff..

A graduate of **HEC** business school and of the **ENA** school of administration, Hollande worked at the **Cour des Comptes** before becoming elected as a député for the Corrèze - the same department as Jacques **Chirac** - in 1988. In 1997 he was elected first secretary of the Socialist Party, a most he held until 2008. At the time he was considered as rather a soft-liner, the rather dull partner of Ségolène **Royale**, by whom he has four children.

However since Hollande and Royale split up, and Hollande was ousted from the leadership of the Socialist party, he staged a considerable comeback, building an image as a serious candidate with whom the French economy would be in safe hands.

As president, he promised to be a "normal" man, but the normality soon came back to haunt him. Unable to fulfil his election pledges of a drastic cut in unemployment (it rose continually during the first half of his term) and a rapid cut in France's budget deficit (he failed to meet EU deficit reduction targets), Hollande saw his popularity ratings slump to an all-time low for a president of the French Fifth Republic. In order to try and turn round the situation, in 2014 Hollande (just like Mitterrand in his first term) made a major policy U-turn, ousting left wingers and bringing in a centre-left government under a new prime minister, Spanish-born Manuel Valls. The ensuing economic packages put forward to try and bring French industry out of the doldrums were decried by the far-left of his own party as "ultra liberal", and by the conservative opposition as "half measures", and Hollande's popularity ratings continued to fall. By early 2015 had an approval rating of under 20%.

This shot up briefly on account of his good handling of events surrounding the terrorist attacks in Paris in early January. But with France's economic situation showing only limited signs of stabilisation, the president's popularity sank back down again. In the departmental elections of March 2015, the Socialists lost almost half of the French departments they previously governed. In 2016, his popularity remaining low, Hollande decided not to run for reelection in the 2017 presidential election, faced with almost certain defeat. For the second round, he openly supported Emmanuel **Macron** in the runoff against Marine LePen.

Hors gabarit : The *hors gabarit* sign, sometimes seen on French roads, means that the road - or some structure along it - is closed to vehicles exceeding normal height or width. *Hors gabarit* literally means "exceeding the dimensions".

Hôtel de Ville : Town hall, the official building in a French town, in which ceremonial duties are carried out; this is often distinct from the Mairie, which houses municipal offices and services.

Hôtel des Impôts: Tax office

Hue, Robert leader of the French Communist Party (PCF) from 1994 to 2002. During his time in office, the PCF lost some 40% of its membership, in spite of Hue's attempts to modernise the party. But the decline was more due to changing times than to Hue's leadership.

Huit mai : The 8th May 1945, known as VE Day in the UK, was the day on which Nazi Germany capitulated, bring to an end the Second World War in Europe. It is a public holiday in France.

Humanité, l' A daily newspaper, founded by Jean Jaurès in 1904. From 1920 to 1994, it was the official newspaper of the French Communist Party (PCF); today, it remains very close to the PCF.. At the peak of its popularity, the paper sold 400,000 copies a day; today, the figure is a little over 50,000.

Hypokhâgne: See under **Khâgne** and **Classes Préparatoires**



An A-Z Dictionary of France

I



What are *idées reçues*? Is the *Ile de France* really an island? What do the letters *IUT* mean ? And what group of people are known as *les Immortels* ?

Here are the answers to these and other questions concerning French words or names beginning with I

Ibis, Hôtels : one of the major hotel chains, belonging to the [Accor Group](#). Ibis hotels can be found all over France, and in many other countries of Europe. They are mid-range hotels, generally two-star or three-star. See [hotels in France](#).

Ici Paris: the original French "people" magazine, founded in 1945. *Ici Paris* is a weekly popular magazine, with a circulation of over 400,000. It is devoted to stars, romance and trivia, and is currently published by the **Hachette** group.

Idée reçue : received idea, a commonly accepted popular belief or opinion which does not necessarily reflect reality.

IEP - Institut d'Etudes Politiques : popularly referred to as *Sciences Po*, IEP are selective-entry schools of politics and economics, within the French university system. There are currently nine IEP, the most prestigious of them being the IEP de Paris. IEP provide a rounded multidisciplinary higher education and training for future leaders of the private sector and the civil service. They also prepare students for the gruelling competitive entry exams for the [ENA](#), France's top school of administration, and other graduate schools. Students follow courses in politics and economics, but also languages, sociology, history and geography; this multidisciplinary approach, while going against the grain of many traditional concepts of higher education, is popular in France, and is much appreciated by students and employers. Graduates obtain a first degree or a masters degree, depending on the point of exit. The Paris IEP was founded in 1872, the others after the Second World War. See [Higher Education](#).

IFI - Impôt sur la fortune immobilière, or mansion tax, introduced by Emmanuel Macron in 2017 to replace the **ISF** (see below)

IFREMER - Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer : Public research institute, whose mission is to study the resources of the oceans, and their commercial and industrial potential, within the framework of sustainable development.

IGN - Institut Géographique Nationale : national public service agency responsible for the official cartography of France, and the publication of geographic information. The IGN publishes popular series of maps of France, including road maps and specialist maps. The IGN also runs the *Géoportail* website, offering satellite imagery of France similar to that provided by Google Earth.

Ile de France - the region of France surrounding Paris, consisting of eight departments. The *Ile de France* is the most prosperous region in France, and one of the most prosperous regions in Europe. With 11.6 million inhabitants, it is also the most populated region in France. Until 1976, the *Ile de France* was known as the *District de la région parisienne*; it is still commonly referred to in speech and in print as the *Région Parisienne*.

Image d'Epinal : historically a crudely coloured popular print typically showing a religious, romantic or everyday scene, first popularised by Jean-Charles Pellerin, a printer in the town of Epinal (in the Vosges department). Today the expression is used, metaphorically, to describe an image or idea that gives a rather naive and rosy-tinted view of reality.

Immortels, les : nickname given to members of the [Académie Française](#) (q.v.)

Impôt sur le revenu - Income tax. Income tax in France is levied as a progressive tax, with five rates going from zero to 40%. Income tax is charged per "*foyer fiscal*", or fiscal household, and recognised couples are taxed as a couple, not as two individuals. Thanks to a number of tax allowances and deductions, about half of the working population in France pay no income tax. However everyone pays the CSG and CRDS, which are forms of income tax in everything but in name, and correspond to a flat rate tax of 11%. If these taxes are included, then French levels of income tax go from 11% to 51%.

Impôt sur les sociétés : Company tax or the French equivalent of Corporation tax. A tax paid on the profits of companies. In 2008, there are two rates, the standard rate of 33.33%, and a reduced rate of 15% applicable to the first 38,120 Euros of profit, for small companies with a turnover not exceeding 7.63 million Euros

Impôts locaux: Local taxes, rates. Taxes paid by households and businesses on the basis of the property owned or occupied. For households, there are two local taxes, the tax on property, called the *taxe foncière*, and the occupation tax, called [*taxe d'habitation*](#).

Impressionists : Name given to a group of avant-garde artists working in Paris and elsewhere, mainly in France, from the 1870s to the 1920s. Though frequently called the "French Impressionists", the Impressionists were actually an international group, and as well as the French painters Monet, Manet, Cézanne, Renoir, Pissaro and Degas, major artists from the group included the Dutch painter Van Gogh, the English painter Sisley and the American Mary Cassat, among others. The name "Impressionists" was taken from the title of a painting by Claude Monet displayed at an exhibition of works by avant-garde artists in Paris in 1874. The name rapidly became used to describe a style of figurative painting concerned more with the effects of light and colour on objects and scenes, than with objective portrayal of these objects, scenes or people. The vivid techniques of colour and light effects pioneered by the Impressionists had a lasting impact on the development of art in the twentieth century; in particular they influenced the significant movements in European art, including pointillism and the post-impressionists such as Signac, Fauvism with the works of Matisse and Vlaminck, the Nabis such as Bonnard and Vuillard, and even Cubism.

Indice des Prix - Price index. Expression most commonly used to refer to the French retail price index, or consumer inflation index.

Indivision : legal term defining the status of property, notably land and buildings, owned jointly by the heirs of a deceased owner. French inheritance laws provide for the obligatory sharing of the estate of a deceased person among his or her direct descendants (children). When, as often, a person does not formally divide up their property among their heirs before death, all their estate passes jointly to their children or nearest family. Until such time as these heirs agree on how the estate will be divided among them, the estate remains in "indivision"; this means that no property can be sold off without the agreement of all the heirs. When one or more of these heirs is out of contact, or deliberately uncooperative, this can lead to a situation where property, notably buildings, remain empty and unsaleable for years on end. However, since 2007, the law has been modified to allow heirs representing at least 2/3 of the rights of ownership to apply to the courts for permission to sell a property; in other words, if two out of three children wish to sell a property, and the third does not, the courts can now prevent the third one from blocking the sale. The heir who does not wish to sell retains the right to buy out the shares of the other heirs. Note that property for which a surviving spouse has a right of usufruct cannot be sold off.

Shares in an undivided estate can be sold by any heir who wishes to do so; but the purchaser remains bound by the rules of indivision.

Industrial relations : see **Conflits sociaux**.

Ineguy : Ewe's milk pressed cheese from the Basque region of south-west France, similar to other southern European ewe's milk cheeses such as Pecorino.

INSEAD - (Originally *Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires*) - One of France's top schools of management, located in Fontainebleau, south of Paris. It has a branch in Singapore. A private institution founded in 1957, INSEAD is one of the world's top business schools, and one renowned for its multicultural and "non-dogmatic" approach to learning. INSEAD's list of alumni includes the CEOs of dozens of leading international companies .

INSEE - Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques: This is the French National Statistical Institute. It is attached to the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and is responsible notably for conducting censuses and undertaking a broad range of statistical analyses of French society and the economy.

Inspection du Travail : The French labour inspectorate. Les Inspecteurs du Travail are civil servants whose job is to check that employers respect labour laws - as specified in the arcane Code du Travail. In France, the main job of these inspectors is perceived as being to verify compliance with laws regarding terms of employment, working hours, and pay; however their mission is also to check compliance with workplace health and safety regulations. Having the right to inspect businesses without warning, they are much dreaded by many employers, particularly by the directors of small and medium-sized companies ([PMEs](#)).

Institut de France The **Institut de France** (French Institute), also referred to simply as "l'Institut", is a multidisciplinary learned society, including the members of the five French "*Académies*". It was founded in 1795. Its stated mission is to perfect the arts and the sciences through the meeting of great minds from different fields; and to manage the thousands of donations and legacies that it receives for this purpose.

Instituteur: until the 1990s, the word 'instituteur' referred to teachers in France's primary schools, or **écoles primaires**. Following the upgrading of the qualifications required to teach in the primary sector in France (a [licence](#) degree is now required), the title has been officially replaced by '*Professeur des écoles*'. However, particularly in rural France, local primary school teachers are still commonly referred to as 'instituteurs' – sometimes shortened (particularly in spoken slang) to *instite*.

Intermittents du Spectacle - People working intermittently in the media and culture sector, including part-time actors, stage hands and technicians. At the start of the twenty-first century, *les Intermittents du Spectacle* benefited from extremely attractive conditions for obtaining unemployment benefit – far less stringent than conditions applied to other types of worker. Judging that the system was being abused and exploited both by many workers themselves and by the media and production companies employing them, the government decided in 2003 to tighten the conditions of entitlement to unemployment benefit. This led to massive strikes and protest actions by the Intermittents, and even to the cancellation of the 2003 Avignon theatre festival. The rules were eventually tightened up in 2006, though *Intermittents* still benefit from an easier entitlement to benefits than most other employees.

Internaute - person using the Internet

ISF - Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune : former French wealth tax, which was phased out by Emmanuel Macron in 2017. The ISF was long seen by the left in France as being a socially-just and redistributive way of taxing wealth, but by the liberal right as a tax on success. Successive governments vowed to do away with it, but failed to do so as it was never a vote-catcher. However one of the pledges of Emmanuel Macron, as he ran for the presidency, was to make France a more attractive environment; the ISF was seen as one of the factors driving wealthy individuals, both French and foreign, to reside in, and therefore pay taxes in, other countries such as Belgium, Switzerland, or Monaco, where there is no wealth tax. Taking this into account, studies suggested that the ISF was likely to have deprived the French treasury of more tax than it actually generated, and for this reason getting rid of the ISF was one of the first pledges on which Macron made good, after becoming president. It was replaced by a mansion tax, the **IFI**.

IUT - Institut Universitaire de Technologie : Institutions within French universities, benefiting from a certain degree of independence and flexibility relative to normal faculties and schools. IUT were founded in the 1960s, within existing universities, as institutes of higher education offering two year diplomas, called DUTs, in technical fields. Since then, they have been developed, and now offer longer courses covering three or four years of study, including *Licences* (the equivalent of BA or BSc degrees) and *DUTA*, Advanced University Technology Diplomas.



A Dictionary of France

J



Where is the **Jura**? What is the **Journal Officiel** ? And of what French city was former prime-minister **Alain Juppé** the mayor ? Here are the answers to these questions and others concerning French words or names beginning with J

J-1 (J moins un) : expression applied on the day before an event, or, figuratively, the last moments.

Joly, Eva : Of Franco-Norwegian origin, Eva Joly was one of France's high profile investigating magistrates before becoming better known as a militant environmental campaigner. In 2011, she was selected to run as the candidate of Europe-Ecologie-les Verts, the French Green party, in the [2012 presidential election](#). Forthright and outspoken in a manner uncommon in the world of French politics, she caused major stirs in the early days of campaigning, but lost a lot of support as a result, even from supposed allies in the environmental movement.

Jospin, Lionel - (adj Jospiniste) - born 1937 : Socialist Prime Minister of France from 1997 to 2002. Jospin served as Minister of Education under Prime Minister Michel Rocard from 1988 to 1992; before and after this period, he was first secretary (leader) of the French Socialist party. In 1995, he was selected as socialist candidate in the Presidential election, and was only narrowly defeated in the second round by Jacques Chirac. In 1997, Jospin led the socialists to a decisive victory at the general election, and was subsequently called by Chirac to form a Socialist government.

Though once a Trotskyist, and reputed as a left-winger, Jospin proved to be a very middle-of-the -road Prime Minister. His government introduced the much maligned principle of the official 35-hour working week, but also oversaw the privatisation of a number of state industries and tax reductions. In 2002, he was beaten into third place by the National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of the presidential election.

Jour Férié : public holiday, bank holiday. The following days are public holidays ("jours fériés") in France, when all or most shops tend to be shut. For a list of jours fériés, see [Public holidays in France](#)

Unlike in the UK, when a public holiday falls during a weekend, there is no extra compensating holiday on the following Monday. However, "le pont" - the bridge - is a popular French institution, and when a public holiday falls on a Tuesday or a Thursday, many workplaces remain closed for the Monday or Friday too, meaning that certain services will be closed for four days. However, shops and banks and post offices tend to open normally when there is a "pont".

Journal de 20 heures: the principal evening news programme on French TV,, particularly the 8 p.m news programme on the independent (commercial) channel TF1. TF1 and France2, the two main TV channels in France, both schedule their main evening news programme at prime time, from 8 p.m to 8.45 p.m each evening.

Journal Officiel, le- The "**J.O.**" is the official publication of the French government. Laws and decrees come into effect once they have been published in the J.O.

Jour Férié : public holiday, bank holiday. See [Public holidays in France](#)

Journée continue: The traditional French working and shopping day is broken by a long break for lunch, typically from midday to 2 p.m. The "journée continue" is the more modern approach, where workers just take a very short lunch break, and shops remain open all day.

July 14th : Le quatorze Juillet, Bastille Day, the French National Day, and a public holiday. This day commemorates the fall of the Bastille prison in 1789, the defining moment of the French Revolution.

Juppé, Alain (born 1945) : conservative politician, Foreign Minister 1993 - 1995, Prime Minister of France from 1995 to 1997, under President Jacques [Chirac](#). In 2004 Juppé was convicted of mishandling public funds, and retired from public life. To the surprise of many, he nevertheless retained the confidence and support of many of his supporters and political stablemates, including Chirac, and in 2006 began a political comeback, being reelected as mayor of [Bordeaux](#), and remaining in this job until early 2019. In 2007, he was briefly minister for the environment, but resigned from this job after failing to get reelected to parliament by voters in his Bordeaux constituency, a city of which he remains mayor. He returned to government in March 2011, recalled by Nicolas Sarkozy to replace Foreign Secretary Michèle Aliot Marie, who was ousted following revelations of her dealings with former but recently ousted North African leaders.

In 2019 he was appointed to the Conseil constitutionnel, or Constitutional council

Jura (1) A rural French department (no. 39) in the [Franche Comté](#) area, capital Lons le Saunier. .

Jura (2) Mountain range along the French Swiss border, running south-west / north-east from the Rhone valley near Geneva to the **Belfort** gap, mostly in the area of [Franche-Comté](#). The main towns are Pontarlier and Saint Claude. Among the oldest mountains in France, the limestone Jura rise on the French side through a series of plateaux and folds, reaching their peaks, at between 1400 and 1700 metres, more or less on the Swiss border. On the Swiss side of the border, the range falls away much more steeply. The plateaux of the Jura are cut into by a number of deep gorges, the most dramatic being those of the Ain, the Doubs and the Loue rivers. The Jura is mainly a mix of pastures and coniferous forest, with deciduous forests on the lower levels; it is famous for its mountain cheeses (**Comté, Mont d'Or**), and for its watch and clockmaking industry, which is closely linked to the Swiss watch industry.

Jura (3) Wine. Possibly the most underrated of French white wines, Jura wines come from the west-facing slopes of the Jura hills, that look out across the wide Saône valley to the slopes of **Burgundy** on the other side. The best and most distinctive of Jura whites are made from the "Savagnin" grape variety, which is found only in this region, and gives the wine a distinctive sherry-like taste. further information on the [wines](#) page.

Jussieu - Name of one of the central [Paris university](#) campuses, occupied essentially by science departments of three Paris universities. The campus, whose main buildings were built between 1958 and 1971, has never been completed, and the campus is still a building site, on account of the massive ongoing programme to remove the asbestos from classrooms, laboratories and offices. In 2007, many of the services of the University of Paris VII left the Jussieu campus for a new campus near the Seine.



A Dictionary of France

K



A dictionary of France, including institutions, places, a few significant people (excluding film stars and "people" people), French specialities, and a selection of other useful or intriguing expressions....

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>I</u>
<u>J</u>	<u>K</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>Q</u>	
<u>R</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>V</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Z</u>

Photo top of page: General de Gaulle wearing his general's **kepi**

K-bis (Pronounced Car-bis) : an "**Extrait K-bis**" is an official document certifying that a company is duly registered as such, and thus has a legal existence. Delivered by the local Tribunal de commerce, or Commercial tribunal, it provides a brief but detailed statement of the company's legal status, identity, ownership, and field of business. It is sometimes demanded by banks and administrations, or by corporate suppliers who require a guarantee before opening up an account for a new customer

Kanaks : Indigenous inhabitants of the French south pacific territory of New Caledonia (Nouvelle Calédonie).

Képi : cylindrical cap worn as formal headwear by soldiers and gendarmes in France. As a form of headwear rarely found outside France or areas of French influence, the képi has become one of the iconic symbols of France. For instance almost all the famous photos and cartoons of General de Gaulle show him wearing his general's képi. See photo of General de Gaulle, top of page.

Khâgne: The first year of **classes préparatoires** in the literary stream. Students who have just passed the literary or economics/social **baccalaureate**, and who want to take the **concours** (competitive entrance exams) for certain **grandes écoles**, may well choose to stay on for two more years at lycée, in small select classes called khâgne and hypokhâgne, rather than enrol in large classes in the first two years of university arts or social science faculties. See [Higher Education in France](#)

Kiabi : Major chain of off-the-peg clothing retail outlets in France, founded in 1978. In mid 2008, Kiabi had about 150 outlets in France, plus outlets in Spain, Italy and the Middle East. Kiabi belongs to the Mulliez group, one of France's large family companies that also owns the Auchan hypermarket chain (q.v.). The name is a play on words: put the name of a town after it, for instance "*Kiabi Paris*", and it sounds just like "Qui habille Paris?", or Who clothes Paris?

Kinésithérapeutie: physiotherapy

Kir : popular apéritif drink, also known as a "*blanc-cassis*" or a "*blanc-ca*", made up of a dash of blackcurrant liqueur in a glass of white wine. an alternative version, called *Kir Royal*, is a dash of blackcurrant liqueur in a glass of champagne or sparkling white wine. The drink is named in honour of Chanoine Kir (Canon Félix Kir), a catholic priest who became a Resistance hero in World War II, and later mayor of Dijon, the capital of [Burgundy](#), and who regularly offered it to guests. Blackcurrants are a local speciality in the Dijon area.

Kouchner, Bernard : born 1939. Doctor, politician. Kouchner was co-founder of the international medical charity *Médecins sans Frontières* (q.v.). As a politician, he was a leading member of the Socialist Party, and held ministerial portfolios, as Minister of health, under four Socialist prime ministers. However, disappointed by the failure of the Socialist Party to modernise, he was one of the leading Socialists

to accept an invitation to join the "open" conservative government of François Fillon, following the election of President Sarkozy. He remained France's foreign secretary until 2010, when he was replaced by Michèle Aliot Marie.

Krazucki, Henri : (1924 - 2003) Of Polish-Jewish extraction, Krazucki was born in Warsaw, For four decades he held senior positions in the French Communist Party, and from 1982 to 1992 was Secretary General of the CGT, France's biggest trade union.

Krivine, Alain : (Born 1941) Once one of the leaders of the student uprising in France in 1968, Alain Krivine has remained a militant Trotskyist all his life, and a member of the extreme left-wing political party, the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire*, or LCR. Thanks to the system of proportional representation, he was elected and sat as an MEP in the European parliament from 1998 to 2004.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

L



L is for Loire.....

A dictionary of France, including institutions, places, a few significant people (excluding film stars and "people" people), French specialities, and a selection of other useful or intriguing expressions....

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>I</u>
<u>J</u>	<u>K</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>Q</u>	
<u>R</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>V</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Z</u>

L'Oréal : L'Oréal is France's and the world's largest cosmetics and beauty products company. In 2006, it took over the Body Shop in a move that angered many of the latter's customers, since L'Oréal uses animal testing in its laboratories – a practice contrary to the Body Shop ethic. L'Oréal is a **CAC 40** company. L'Oreal is owned 30% by the Bettencourt family and 26% by Nestlé. In 2010, chief shareholder Liliane Bettencourt, daughter of the company's founder, was at the centre of a media frenzy over allegations of tax evasion and political favours involving President Sarkozy's Minister for the Budget Eric Woerth.

Laguiller, Arlette: Born 1940. The *Passionaria* of French politics in the last third of the 20th Century. A Trotskyist, she was the high-profile leader of the left-wing *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO) political party for over 30 years, and holds the record for the number of times she has stood as a candidate in Presidential elections, six. In 2002, she polled over 5% of the vote.

Laïcité, la : Many people in France get passionate about the principle of *laïcité* to a degree that their neighbours often find hard to understand. *Laïcité* literally translates as 'secularism', and refers to the principal of the separation of church and state, and the fact that there is no established religion in France. Most frequently, the term is nowadays used in two contexts, on the one hand as a reminder that there is no place for religious instruction in the state education system, and on the other to counter the development of Islamic fundamentalism.

It has often been argued that the issue of *laïcité* arouses such heated passions among some of its activists in France, that it is almost a religion in its own right, a form of atheism.

Passions over *laïcité* are a heritage of the years of the French Revolution, notably the time of the Terror, when religion was temporarily outlawed. The principle of *laïcité* in education was established in 1881 by the Jules Ferry law, and the separation of church and state finally established by law in 1905. While the Communist party, and other far left parties, are the most stalwart defenders of *laïcité* in modern France, politicians of all parties, both left and right, regularly express their attachment to the principle. The principle of *laïcité* is one that applies to public life, and does not infringe on the individual's right to practice religion.

Lalonde, Brice Born 1946. Lalonde was the first "green" politician in France to gain a position of influence in French government. President of the Student Union UNEF during the events of 1968, he later founded the French branch of Friends of the Earth, and subsequently became a Greenpeace activist, campaigning against French nuclear tests in the south Pacific. He was director of campaign for the first green candidate in a presidential election, René Dumont in 1974, and subsequently ran for president himself. In 1990, he founded the first successful Green party, called *Génération Ecologie*, and was appointed Minister of the environment in the Socialist government of Edith Cresson, a post he held for just one year.

Languedoc-Roussillon: region in the centre of the south of France, stretching from the Rhone to the Pyrenees. Capital Montpellier. Languedoc-Roussillon stretches from the Rhone valley to the Spanish border, and is composed of five departments, four of them coastal - Gard, Hérault, Aude and Pyrénées Orientales - and one inland and mountainous, Lozère. See [Languedoc guide](#)

Lascaux : the site of the most famous paleolithic cave paintings in France, if not in the world. Lascaux is in the department of the [Dordogne](#). Discovered in 1940, the cave became a major tourist attraction, but was closed in 1963 on account of the damage being done to the 16,000 year old paintings by the presence of so many humans. Twenty years later, Lascaux II, a faithful reproduction of part of the original cave, situated 200 metres from it, was opened to the public. The site was classed as a UNESCO world heritage site in 1979.

Latin quarter - the old student [quarter of Paris](#) situated on the left bank of the Seine, around the Sorbonne university.

LCI - La Chaine Info , French 24-hour TV news channel

LCL - a bank - see Crédit Lyonnais

Le Pen, Jean-Marie (adj Lepéniste): Born 1928. Founder and long-time leader of the right-wing *Front National* (FN) (National Front) party. In his youth, le Pen was involved with a number of extreme right-wing youth movements, and enjoyed a reputation as a brawler. A lawyer by training, le Pen served with the Foreign Legion in Algeria during the war for Algerian independence. He was first elected to the French parliament in 1956, at the age of 28, on a right-wing populist ticket. In 1972, his rise to national prominence began after he created the National Front party. Campaigning on an anti-immigration and anti-European Union platform, the FN picked up seats in municipal, regional, parliamentary and European elections. Le Pen himself was elected to the European parliament in 1984; then in 1986 he was re-elected to the French National Assembly, along with 33 other FN deputies, when proportional representation was (briefly) introduced into the election process. Since 1994, he has always been reelected to the European Parliament.

Le Pen's most remarkable achievement, however, was in 2002, when, as a candidate in the Presidential election, he scored 16.86% of the vote, becoming one of the two candidates to go through to the second round – where he lost heavily to Jacques Chirac..

During his turbulent life, Le Pen has had a number of run-ins with the law, including the following examples and several more. In 1971 he was found guilty of "apologies for war crimes". In 1987 he received the first of several condemnations for inciting racial hatred. In the same year, he caused outrage by suggesting that the Auschwitz gas chambers were merely "a detail of history". In 1991 he was condemned for "banalising crimes against humanity". In 2008 he was condemned to a suspended prison sentence for apologising for war crimes and denying crimes against humanity.

Le Pen, Marine. Daughter of the above, succeed her father as leader of the Front National in 2010. Candidate for the French presidential elections of 2012. Since taking over from her father, Marine le Pen has tried to give the party a softer image, and has seen its popularity grow to new levels. In 2015 the FN had high hopes of gaining control of at least one French Department council in the departmental elections; but this failed to materialize, as many well placed FN candidates were defeated in the runoffs thanks to the strength of the anti-FN vote.

LEA - [Langues Etrangères Appliquées](#) - the most popular type of modern languages degree course offered in French universities; students study two foreign languages plus business and economics.

Leclerc, centres One of the biggest of the French hypermarket chains. The *Centres Leclerc* enjoy a reputation for low prices and good quality, and have led many campaigns in favour of the right of retail distribution chains to expand their activities, for example by opening up in-store chemists counters. The group was the first retail distributor to bid for, and obtain, concessions for motorway service stations in France.

Leclerc, Michel Edouard Chief executive of the *Centres Leclerc* hypermarkets group. See above.

Lefèbvre, Monseigneur Marcel, 1905 - 1991 : Integrist **Catholic** archbishop. Archbishop of Dakar, Senegal, then bishop of Tulle, France. In 1970 Lefèbvre defied the Catholic church in protest against its modernisation, and the phasing out of mass in Latin, and formed a schismatic movement, the Society (or Fraternity) of St. Pius X., based at a seminary in Switzerland. In 1975, he ordained 13 priests in defiance of the Vatican, and in 1976 was excluded from the Catholic church. Thereafter, his supporters took over the St. Nicolas du Chardonnet church in **Paris**. After a number of unsuccessful attempts at conciliation, the Vatican excommunicated Lefèbvre in 1988. The integrist and traditionalist Society of St Pius X still exists, and is now active in some fifty countries, including the USA and Great Britain. It appears to be a wealthy organisation.

Left Bank. *La Rive Gauche*, or Left Bank, is traditionally the more popular and bohemian side of **Paris**. Though the expression literally includes all the districts of Paris to the south of the **Seine**, it is often used in a more restrictive sense to refer essentially to the **Latin Quarter**, or the fifth and sixth **arrondissements**.

Légion d'honneur *Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur* (National Order of the Legion of Honour) Established in 1802 by Napoleon, the Légion d'Honneur is the highest civil and military decoration in France. The order is divided into five grades: Chevalier (Knight), Officier (Officer), Commandeur (Commander), Grand Officier (Grand Officer) and Grand-Croix (Grand Cross). The Grand Master of the order is the French head of state, i.e. the President. The award is given to people of exceptional merit in all walks of life, rather like an OBE or a knighthood in the UK. It cannot however be awarded to members of parliament (Députés). People who have received this award frequently show this - notably on formal occasions - by wearing a very discreet small red lapel band.

Légion étrangère, La : the French Foreign Legion. A vestige of the colonial era, the Foreign Legion was founded in 1831 as a unit for foreign nationals wanting to enlist in the French army. Originally it was based in Algeria, and its main function was (along with other regiments) to protect French colonies. After the Second World War, it is alleged that many ex-SS troopers signed up for the Legion, where discretion was assured, in order to escape from their past. The Legion had the reputation, in the past, of being a place where people on the run could create themselves a new identity.

A legionnaire can apply for French nationality after three years' service, or less if he has been injured fighting for France.

Today's legion is still mostly formed of foreign nationals, from many different countries, though the majority of officers are French. The Legion's headquarters are now in Aubagne, near Marseilles. The Legion is an active fighting unit in the French Army, and its regiments are regularly deployed on missions round the world.

Législatives, élections French general (parliamentary) elections. These occur every five years, the most recent having taken place in 2007. The elections take place on two successive Sundays. If, in the first round, one candidate obtains an overall majority, representing at least 25% of potential voters, he or she is elected, and there is no second round. Otherwise, all candidates who have obtained a score representing at least 12.5% of voters on the electoral list (not of the votes actually cast) can go through to the second round. Usually this means two candidates, sometimes three, and on very rare occasions four.

Lelouch, Claude : Born 1937 Popular film director, best known for his film *Un Homme et une Femme* (A Man and a Woman), 1966, which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes (q.v.) and the Oscar for the best foreign film.

LEP - see [Lycée Professionnel](#)

Libéral, libéralism : To a good proportion of left-thinking people in France, the words "*libéral*" and "*libéralism*" are terms of abhorrence, much in the way that the terms "Communist" or "Communism" were to Thatcherites in the UK. In this sense of the word, *le libéralisme* is seen only

to mean free market economic liberalism in its most extreme form, a type of lawless limitless capitalism in which there are no checks and balances, an economic system in which the rich exploit the poor without qualms or restraint.

Libération (1) : La Libération was the liberation of France from Nazi occupation in 1944.

Libération (2) : Libération, popularly referred to as *Libé*, is one of the major French national daily papers. It was founded in 1973 by a group of intellectuals, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Serge July, as a radical left-wing paper in the spirit of the 1968 protest movement. Originally the paper took no advertising, and was run on collectivist lines. In the 1990s, the paper moved towards the centre-left, where it remains to this day; however it has generally branded itself as being unattached to any party or power, free to voice its own opinions and criticism. By the early 2000's, Libération was coming up against financial problems, and faced an uncertain future; it was rescued in 2005 by financier Edouard de Rothschild, but since then the situation has remained tense; many of the paper's employees, including July and other leading journalists, have been fired or resigned in protest against a perceived erosion of editorial independence. In 2007, the paper had a circulation of 132,000, a fall of almost 25% in six years.

Licence, une : (1) The standard first degree awarded by French universities. A *Licence ès Lettres* corresponds to a B.A., and a *Licence ès Sciences* to a B.Sc. See [Higher Education in France](#)

(2) A word meaning a permit, as in *Licence équestre* (riding permit, a document attesting that a person is insured for horse riding) or *Licence de golf* (best described as a Golf club membership card).

Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux : see LPO.

Limousin: An upland region in central western France, bordered by Poitou-Charentes, Centre, Auvergne, Midi-Pyrénées and Aquitaine. Capital Limoges. Limousin is made up of three departments; Corrèze, Creuse and Haute-Vienne. It is the least populated region of continental France, and has been in steady population decline for over a century. It is the French region with the oldest population. However, the population has shown a slight and unexpected rise since the start of the 21st century, due to an influx of British and Dutch residents, attracted by the area's low population density and low house prices. See [Limousin region](#) .

Lip - Iconic French watch manufacturer, the most spectacular victim of the collapse of the French watch industry in the early 1970s. In 1973, the Lip factory in Besançon became a symbol of worker contestation; employees refused to accept the closure of the plant, and took it over in an act of defiance. Watch production continued for several weeks, until the plant was stormed by riot police. 100,000 people gathered in Besançon on 29th September, in support of the workers, but eventually the plant was closed down and sold to businessman Claude Neuschwander. Production started up again, but the company was unable to compete against cheap eastern imports, and went into liquidation in 1976. Later, the brand name was bought, and Lip watches are again produced - but mostly in China. A few are produced in France, but not in Besançon.

Livret A - The standard and popular basic savings account, previously offered only by the French post office savings bank (Les CCP, comptes chèques postaux), but now available from most banks. There is a limit on the amount that a person can place in a Livret A account (in 2008 this is 15,300 Euros), the rate of interest is medium to poor (4% in 2008), but interest is tax free.

Livret jeune: Savings account for young people

LMD - Licence, Maîtrise, Doctorat. The name of the degree structure adopted since the start of the 21st century by French universities, in accordance with the European "Bologna" system. At one stage called the 3-5-8 system, on account of the number of years of higher

education required to achieve the various degree qualifications.

Loi 1901, see [Association loi 1901](#)

Loire, La : (*Photo top of page*) The longest river in France, and the longest surviving "natural" river in western Europe. Length 1020 km. Rising at over 1300 metres in the Cévennes mountains in the department of Ardèche, the Loire flows north as far as Orleans, then westwards to its mouth at Saint Nazaire, on the Atlantic coast just south of Brittany. The Loire is considered a "natural" river, on account of the few human-built restrictions to its natural flow, which varies considerably from season to season. For much of its lower reaches, the Loire is bordered by stone and earth levées, built in the 17th century, and imitated later on the other side of the Atlantic in Louisiana, beside the great Mississippi. Salmon once thrived in this river and its tributary the Allier; they are currently being reintroduced. Once a major waterway, the Loire is only properly navigable today as far as the city of Angers. "La Loire" is also the name of a French department, number 42, capital St. Etienne. *Photo top of page.*

Loire wines. Although there are some excellent wines produced in the large Loire Valley area, there are few Loire wines, whites, rosés or pale reds, that rank among the greatest French wines. "Anjou Rosé" is a good everyday rosé, and "Muscadet" and "Gros Plant" from near the mouth of the Loire are dry white wines that go excellently with seafood. See [wine guide](#) for further details..

Longchamp, Hippodrome de : The main Paris racecourse (horse racing).

Loréal : see [L'Oréal](#)

Lorient, Festival Interceltique de : Celtic music and dance festival held each year in the Breton port of Lorient..

Lorraine : French region located in north east France, bordering Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Champagne-Ardenne, Alsace, and Franche Comté. The administrative capital of Lorraine is Metz; but the urban area of Nancy is the region's largest conurbation. Lorraine was formerly a major industrial region, with large steelworks in the Moselle valley, and along the German border in the area of Forbach. The region is made up of four departments, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Meuse, Moselle and Vosges. Like their neighbours in Alsace, the people of the north of the region, along the German border, have a regional language of Germanic origin. Moselle Franconian is closely related to the Luxembourgish Franconian spoken in Luxembourg. For further information see [Lorraine regional guide](#).

Louvre, Palais du : The principal museum in Paris, formerly a royal palace, housing one of the world's greatest art collections. The museum is normally open six days a week, but closed on Tuesdays. Entry is free on the first Sunday of each month. The Louvre contains works by virtually all the world's great masters, as well as a large collection of historic artefacts from all continents and all ages. The most famous item in the Louvre is the Mona Lisa, painted by Leonardo da Vinci, and known in French as *La Joconde*.

Louvre group : formerly called Envergure, the Louvre group is the second largest hotel company in France, owning in particular the **Campanile**, Kyriad and Première classe chains. See also **Accor**. In March 2015, the Louvre group was taken over by a chinese hospitality company Jin Jiang International.

LPO : Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux - French national federation of ornithologists, founded in 1912, and the French equivalent of Britain's RSPB. It has 40,000 members, which is small by international standards. The LPO is a pressure group for the defence of birds and their environment.

Lutte Ouvrière : Trotskyist political party. See also **Laguiller**, Arlette (above).

LVMH : Louis Vuitton – Moët Hennesy. A large holding company specialising in luxury products, LVMH is the main or unique shareholder in a range of products including perfume, jewelery, designer clothes, fine foods, drinks and champagne. Among the group's most high profile companies or brands are Christian **Dior**, several top brands of [champagne](#), including Moët & Chandon, Mercier and Krug, Tag Heuer watches, and Guerlain perfumes and cosmetics. It also owns the Sephora chain of beauty products retail outlets. LVMH is a **CAC 40** company.

Lycée: French high school, covering the last three years of secondary education (grades 10 to 12). Important lycées also offer post-baccalaureate classes for selected students. Lycées prepare students to take the [Baccalauréat](#), for subsequent entry into higher education; some lycées also include post-baccalaureate levels preparing students for entry into [Grandes Ecoles](#). For more details see article on [secondary education in France](#)

Lycée Professionnel: (also known as LP, formerly LEP): high-school preparing students for entry into specialised trades. Students in Lycées Professionnels work to obtain diplomas in their particular specialisation. The basic diploma is the CAP (Certificat d'aptitude professionnel), the standard qualification for entry into a number of crafts or trades. Alternatively they work beyond the CAP for a BEP (Brevet d'études professionnelles) which can lead on to the a Baccalauréat professionnel, giving access to higher education. Lycées Professionnels are specialised in a particular field, for example Lycée hôtelier, Lycée du bâtiment, Lycée du bois. Some are in the state sector, others are private establishments.

Lyon (in English, **Lyons**) : the second city in France, located at the confluence of the rivers [Rhône](#) and Saône, about 130 kilometres south west of Geneva. Population: metropolitan area 1.8 million inhabitants – greater Lyon urban area 3 million. Lyon, the capital of the Rhone department, and the [Rhône-Alps region](#), is particularly important as a communications centre, and for its chemical and pharmaceutical industries. Part of the old city of Lyon is classed as a UNESCO world heritage site.

Lyon, Gare de. The most important Parisian railway terminus, the Gare de Lyon is the departure point for trains serving the whole of south eastern France, a segment stretching from **Mulhouse** to **Perpignan**, as well as Switzerland and Italy. It is the Paris terminus of the original and most important **TGV** route, the *TGV Sud Est*. The main building and the great glass vault were built in 1900, to mark the great French Universal Exhibition of that year.

Lyonnaise des Eaux : One of France's big water distribution companies, now part of the Suez group, in turn part of **GDF-Suez**.

Photo top of page: the river Loire



An A-Z Dictionary of France

M



Who is *Marianne* ? And what is the *MEDEF* ? And where exactly is the *Midi* ? Or who reads *le Monde*? Answers to these and many other questions in this "M" section of the dictionary of France..

M 6 - The sixth French TV channel; a commercial channel, M6 is more youth oriented, innovative and and cheeky than the main channels.

Macadam - Monthly magazine sold on the streets of French cities by the homeless ([SDF](#)) and unemployed. Vendors get to keep at least 1€ from the cover price of 2 €. The French equivalent of Britain's "Big Issue" or Germany's "Asphalt", Macadam is affiliated to the International Network of Street Papers.

Macron, Emmanuel. President of France since 2017. Born 1977, Emmanuel Macron came into the public eye when in 2014 he was appointed economic advisor to President François Hollande. At the start of his career Macron was a senior civil servant in the Inspectorate of Finances at the Ministry of the Economy. He then joined Rothschilds investment bank. In 2012 he joined President Hollande's team of advisers, and later in 2014 was appointed to the post of Minister of the Economy in the first Valls administration.

His profile as a former investment banker did not go down well with the left wing of Hollande's government, and nor did his liberalising economic policies. His economic reform package that came in in 2015, and is known as the Loi Macron, included rolling back restrictions on Sunday trading, opening up the intercity bus and coach market to private competition, and attacking restrictive practices in France's regulated professions (legal professions, pharmacists, bailiffs etc.).

In 2015 he founded his own political movement (not a party) called *En Marche* (perhaps best translated as *Just do it*) and subsequently announced that he was standing for the presidency as an anti-system independent in the 2017 [Presidential elections](#).

Initially seen as an outsider, Macron surged into the limelight as the potential frontrunner following the "Penelopegate" scandal that derailed the campaign of the previous frontrunner François [Fillon](#). Fillon was accused of having given well paid but fictitious jobs to his wife Penelope over a period of eight years – an accusation that whether true or not was enough to seriously damage his claim to be a Mr. Clean in politics. With Fillon out of the way, Macron surged to victory, beating Marine Le Pen in the second round, to become, aged 39, the youngest French head of state since Napoleon.

After a shortlived "honeymoon" Macron soon lost popularity as he struggled to introduce many much-needed reforms, covering public services, taxes, and the environment. His early economic reforms, including simplifying labour laws and benefits, earned him the wrath of the left and the nickname of being the President of the rich. His popularity plummeted in late 2018 after reaction to fuel tax increases led to the massive Gilets Jaunes (Yellow vests) protests; however he rode the crisis out with relative skill, organising a number of public consultations, and in 2019, as the protests dwindled, his popularity rose accordingly.

On the international stage, Macron has established himself as a champion of the European cause, as well as of environmental issues, and has repeatedly called for conciliation and dialogue in the face of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

Madelin, Alain : Born 1946. Former minister, Alain Madelin was renowned as the most strident defender of economic liberalism in France, during the early 1990s, at a time when "[liberalism](#)" was still the "L" word, even for many French conservatives. A right-wing activist during his student days, virulently anti-Socialist, Madelin later joined [Giscard](#) d'Estaing's centre-right UDF party. He held a number of ministerial portfolios, eventually being appointed Minister of Finance and the Economy by prime minister Edouard [Balladur](#) in 1995; Balladur however sacked him after three months, judging Madelin too [liberal](#). In reality, Madelin was ahead of his times, and many of his economic ideas -

aimed at freeing up the French economy - have since been put in place. In 1997, he became president of the Parti Républicain (PR), which he later renamed *Démocratie Libérale* (DL): in 2003 DL merged with the mainstream conservative UMP party. Madelin retired from politics in 2007.

Maghrébins: People from North Africa, notably from the former French colonies or protectorates of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. French national censuses do not include questions about ethnicity, but it is estimated that about 5% of the population of modern France (some 3 million people) are partly or fully of Maghreban descent.

Magny Cours. French motor racing circuit, near Nevers in the Nièvre department, some 250 km south of Paris, formerly site of French Formula 1 Grand Prix races.

MAIF : large insurance cooperative (friendly society), only open to active or retired employees of the French state education service. The MAIF was reputed to offer very competitive insurance rates; today it is particularly appreciated as an honest insurer and one which pays up quite fast when a claim is made. Since 1988 the Maif has a subsidiary called Filia Maif which is open to anyone. The MAIF brands itself as a "militant insurer" based on values of solidarity and friendship, offering an alternative to for-profit insurance companies run by large financial corporations.

Maire : Mayor, the chief executive of a Commune, or municipality. Among the many functions of French mayors are that of officiating at marriages. Mayors are elected for a six-year term in office, by municipal councillors, following a municipal election. The person chosen is generally the leader of the "list" which gained the majority of seats on the council following the election.

Mairie: Municipal offices, building housing the main administrative office or offices (depending on the size) of a commune or a town. Mairies are responsible for the management of local services and local administrative formalities, such as the registration of births, deaths and marriages.

Maître de Conférences: tenured university lecturer or senior lecturer.

Maîtrise : Old type of masters degree, generally obtained following the successful completion of four years of higher education. Following reform of the higher education system in France in the early 2000s, and adoption of the European "Bologna" system, the maîtrise was phased out, and replaced by a new five-year master's qualification, known as the "Master" (pronounced Mast-air).

Mammoth : The original brand of French hypermarket. The first Mammoth opened in 1969, the last one closed in 1996.

Manif, short for *Manifestation*. See **Demonstration**

Manifestation, see **Demonstration**

Marc: in its most widespread usage, marc is a high alcohol spirit produced from the residues left after fruit has been pressed to produce other drinks, such as wine or cider. The commonest form of marc is marc de raisin, a strong clear spirit produced from the post-fermentation of pressed grapes. Like Cognac and other digestifs, marc is traditionally drunk as a digestif at the end of a long meal. A small glass of marc is often referred to as a "pousse-café".

Marchais, Georges : (1920 - 1997) First secretary of the French Communist Party (PCF) from 1972 to 1994. Marchais was very much a mainstream politician in France; when he took over the party, it was the biggest political party of the left in French politics, and attracted the votes of about 20% of the French electorate. In the ensuing years, the PCF was overtaken by the rise of the new Socialist Party, led by François Mitterrand, and Marchais could do little or nothing to stop the decline. Though he admitted that the French Communist Party had

been "stalinist" in its past, he did little to modernise it. A member of the French parliament from 1973 to 1997, and also MEP from 1979 to 1989 (See [cumul des mandats](#)), he was never a minister, in spite of the Communists' participation in the Left wing union (*Union de la Gauche*) government from 1982 to 1984.

Marché libre: On the stock exchange, French small caps market.

Marée noire: literally black tide. Expression used to describe marine or coastal oil spillages leading to serious pollution of the shoreline.

Marianne: 1. Marianne is to France what Britannia is to Britain, an allegorical female icon symbolic of the nation. The bust of Marianne, often capped with the revolutionary Phrygian bonnet, adorns many town halls and official buildings. Marianne is supposed to be the incarnation of the spirit of the French Revolution, which is still seen (rightly or wrongly) as being the defining moment in the development of the modern French nation. The image of Marianne has featured almost permanently on French postage stamps (definitive issues), as well as on many coins. In recent years, top models and film stars have posed as models for official sculptures of Marianne. They include Brigitte **Bardot**, Catherine Deneuve, Laetitia Casta and Evelyne Thomas.

Marianne: 2. The name of a weekly newsmagazine founded in 1997. Marianne presents itself as being a magazine of the "radical centre", uncompromisingly opposed to both the left-wing "neo-gauchisme" and the right-wing "neo-libéralisme" (neoconservatism).

Marseillaise. La Marseillaise is the French national anthem. Written by a little known soldier-poet called Rouget de Lisle, it was originally, in 1792, a battle song for the French Rhine armies. It was adopted as national anthem on **July 14th** 1795.

Martinique : French overseas department, situated in the Caribbean.

Massif Central : large area of uplands, covering central southern France from the Rhone to the western coastal plains. it includes most of the [regions](#) of the [Auvergne](#) and the Limousin, and parts of Rhone-Alpes, Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées, and [Languedoc](#). Large parts of the Massif Central are sparsely populated, notably the Cantal, the Creuse, the Aveyron, and Lozère departments, and part of the Haute Loire. With just 15 inhabitants per km², the Lozère department, which includes the uplands of the Aubrac and part of the Causses, is the most sparsely populated department in metropolitan France. (► See [more](#))

Master : First postgraduate degree, awarded after five years of higher education. the Master replaced the Maîtrise (see above) following the LMD reform of [higher education](#) in the early 2000s

Maths-sup: See under [Classes Préparatoires](#)

Matignon, Hôtel de : Official Paris residence of the French Prime Minister. The word "Matignon" is often used, in the same way as "Downing Street" is used in Britain, to designate the Prime Minister's office.

Mauroy, Pierre (born 1928). French socialist politician, Prime Minister from 1981 to 1984, at the start of the first **Mitterrand** presidency. A stalwart Socialist, Mauroy was Mitterrand's first prime minister, and led the government in the early years of the presidency, when policies were most left-wing, and included a programme of nationalisation (at a time when other nations were doing the reverse), a lowering of the retirement age, and the reduction of the working week to 39 hours. As well as playing a major role in the Socialist party from its creation in 1969, he was mayor of the city of Lille from 1973 to 2001, and also the city's **Député**, a classic example of [cumul des mandats](#).

May 1st : **Le Premier Mai**, *La Journée du Travail* - Labour Day, a public holiday in France, when trade unions traditionally organise parades through French towns and cities.

May 8th Le Huit Mai: VE Day. Anniversary of the signing of the Armistice at the end of World War II in Europe. A public holiday in France.

Mazarine : Mazarine Pingeot born 1974 - A French writer, daughter of François **Mitterrand**. In 1994, the magazine Paris Match revealed that President François Mitterrand had for 20 years hidden the fact that he had a daughter, through an extramarital liaison. The "Mazarine affair", which might have caused the downfall of senior politicians in many countries, caused little more than the raising of a few eyebrows in France.

Médecin conventionné : Doctor approved by the French health service. Most doctors working in France are "*conventionnés*". See [health care in France](#).

Médecin de garde : Duty doctor, duty physician. In most French towns, the doctor/s who is/are on call at nights and during the weekend, when most other doctors' surgeries are closed. See [health care](#)

Médecin, Jacques : (1928 - 1998) Long-serving mayor of Nice (1966-1990), and son of a previous mayor of the city. The Medecin family dominated politics in Nice for over half a century, like a family of local princes. His career came to a stuttering end in the late 1980s, following the first of a series of indictments for improprieties in the management of local affairs, including corruption and tax fraud. He fled to Uruguay in 1990, but was extradited in 1994, and spent two years in prison. On release, he returned to Uruguay, where he died two years later.

Médecins sans Frontières, MSF - Doctors without borders - Major French medical NGO, providing medical assistance worldwide, notably in times of war and famine. Founded by Bernard [Kouchner](#), who later became French Foreign Secretary.

MEDEF - Mouvement des Entreprises de France: The French Employers' organisation, which in 1998 replaced the earlier **CNPF** (Conseil National du Patronat Français). It is the French equivalent of Britain's CBI. Also referred to sometimes as *le Patronat* (literally "the bosses"), the MEDEF is one of the [partenaires sociaux](#), representing employers in discussions or negotiations with trade unions and/or the government.

Médiateur de la République: the French equivalent of the U.K.'s Ombudsman, an independent arbitrator whose job is to solve conflicts between individuals and the state. Individual citizens wishing to use the services of the Médiateur cannot apply directly, but must do so by first contacting their local M.P. ([Député](#)).

Médoc wines. The Médoc, the region south of the Gironde estuary to the north west of **Bordeaux**, is the home of many of France's most prestigious wines. Among the famous appellations produced in this area are Saint Estèphe, Margaux, Saint Julien and Pauillac. for more details see [Wines](#) page.

Megret, Bruno - French right-wing politician, and MEP (1989 - 1999), who broke away from Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front party in 1998 to form his own MNR, *Mouvement National Républicain*, party. He retired from politics in 2008.

Menu du jour : the day's special menu in a restaurant, usually offered at a discount rate compared to other comparable dishes.

Mercantour - One of France's six national parks, located in the high Alps, on the Italian border.

Méridienne verte - A millennium project to mark the "Paris meridian" - slightly different from the Greenwich meridian - by the planting of a line of trees, from Dunkerque on the North Sea to Prats de Mollo on the Spanish border.

Messmer, Pierre (1916 - 2007) : Prime minister of France 1972 - 1974 under President Pompidou. A historic figure of the Gaullist movement, and former colonial administrator, Messmer was de **Gaulle's** second-closest adviser. On the traditionalist wing of the Gaullist movement, he was Minister of the Armies at the time of the Algerian war of independence.

Metro, the Paris. First opened in 1900, the Paris Metro (or Métropolitain) is the city's subway system or underground railway system. Most of the network within central Paris is underground, though there are some aerial sections, notably on routes 2 and 6. It is linked with the city's suburban rapid transit system, the RER. The Paris Metro is Europe's second most-used urban subway system after the Moscow underground. Most routes use standard gauge steel rail tracks, though five of the routes operate with rubber-tyred rolling stock, running on concrete tracks. These are considerably quieter than the traditional trains used on other routes. The most recent route, line 14, opened in 1998 and known as the "Météor", uses driverless trains.

Metropolitan France Continental France, **Corsica** and smaller coastal islands.

MGEN : Mutuelle Générale de l'Education Nationale : the health insurance mutual, for employees of the state education system in France.

Michelin: One of France's older and biggest companies, a [CAC 40](#) company, and the world's major tyre manufacturers (20% of the world market). Michelin is based in Clermont Ferrand (Auvergne), where it has a large research facility. Michelin has been responsible for many innovations in the history of the motor type, including the invention of the radial tyre (standard on modern vehicles) . Michelin also publish very popular maps of France and tourist guides.

Midi : Litterally speaking, Midi means midday, but the word has come also to designate the south of France, i.e. the part over which the sun stands at midday, when seen from a northern perspective. As a spatial concept, the word *Midi* is very vague, and there is no specific point at which a traveller from the north enters the *Midi*. For some it is a small area, just including the Mediterranean coastal plain and its direct hinterland, a region characterised by mediterranean climate and vegetation. For others it is anywhere south of the level of Valence, or even south of a line between [Lyon](#) and [Bordeaux](#). The word is included in the name of the area called **Midi Pyrénées** (see below), which thus has a strong claim to be considered as part of the *Midi*. Alternatively, the Midi is perceived as equivalent to the historic area of **Occitania** , which is more extensive than the new region of *Occitanie*, set up in 2016, as it includes all the southern half of France where people spoke dialects of Occitanian French rather than dialects of the standard French of the **Ile de France**.

Midi Libre : Regional daily newspaper founded in 1944 in Montpellier, and distributed throughout the Languedoc region and the department of the Aveyron. Part of the Sud-Ouest news group since 2001. See longer article on [Newspapers in France](#).

Midi-Pyrénées : was in terms of surface, the largest of France's administrative regions. Covering eight departments, the [Midi Pyrenees](#), capital [Toulouse](#), stretches from the Pyrenees to the Massif Central. It is largely rural and agricultural. In 2016 it was merged with neighbouring [Languedoc Roussillon](#) to form the new region of Occitanie.

Millau. Town in the **Aveyron** department, on the river **Tarn**, and site of the new [Viaduc de Millau](#) on the A75 motorway.

Mimolette : A round cheese, made in the area of Lille in the north of France. Its orange colour is the result of the addition of natural coloring. The cheese was originally made as a French variation of the Dutch Edam cheese, to which it is very similar.

Minitel A first generation computerised videotext system, the Minitel briefly put France into the position of world leader in videotext access. Launched in 1982, the Minitel system rapidly entered the majority of French households and offices thanks to a masterly government policy of offering the basic terminals free to all telephone subscribers. Several years before the Internet explosion, the Minitel offered French telephone subscribers free access to a range of information services, including national telephone directories; it also offered a number of

pay-per-view services, receipts from which were designed to help pay back the investment in the system. However, the success of the Minitel was also instrumental in slowing down France's uptake of the Internet. While the government remained keen to protect and promote this French technological success in the face of competition from a foreign system, many Minitel service providers also had a good reason to defend the system too. Provision of information via the Minitel, charged by the second, rapidly became seen as a lucrative activity (notably for the "**Minitel rose**" sites) - far more so than via Internet, where most general information is provided free of charge to the viewer. This economic disincentive meant that many major French providers of Information, such as the **SNCF**, were reluctant to replace, or even complement, slow but profit-making Minitel services by faster free Internet services - thus delaying French uptake of the Internet. Minitel services were completely phased out in 2011.

Minitel Rose. Name given collectively to the large number of soft-porn or erotic **minitel** chatlines that blossomed in the 1990's

Mirage..... The generic name of the most famous family of French jet fighter planes, manufactured by the **Dassault** Aviation company. The first production Mirages, the Mirage III, entered service in 1961 with the French Air Force; the latest variant, the Mirage 2000, first entered service in 1987. Numerous upgrades of the Mirage 2000 have since been developed for French and other air forces.

Mistral 1) The most famous of the winds to blow over France, the Mistral is the north wind that regularly blows down the Rhone valley, south of Lyon, usually bringing cold weather with clear skies to Provence. The Mistral is usually due either to northwest winds coming in off the Atlantic, or cold winds coming over from Central Europe. See [Climate and weather](#).

Mistral 2) Named after the wind, the luxurious express train that used to run daily from 1950 to 1982 between Paris and Nice. The train was first class only, had its own special rolling-stock, and included such sophistications as hostesses, a hardressing salon, and a secretarial service. The train was withdrawn in 1982, following the introduction of TGV services to Nice.

Mitterrand, François (adj. *Mittérandiste*) (1916 - 1996) : Françoisz Mitterrand was the longest serving French president under the Fifth Republic. Mitterrand, a Socialist, served two full terms in office, from 1981 to 1995. He was also the oldest president of the Fifth republic, leaving the job at the age of 78. History will judge how successful Mitterrand was; adulated by his supporters, he was much maligned by his political opponents; but for the second period of both his terms, he was obliged to appoint a Prime Minister from the conservative opposition (leading to a state of "[cohabitation](#)" (q.v.)), following mid-term rejections of his socialist administrations. He will perhaps be remembered as an indecisive president; from 1981 to 1983, he oversaw left-wing policies, including the nationalisation of some banks and other major companies; but from 1983 onwards, this policy went into reverse, and from then on state companies were progressively privatized. He did much to free France from the tight constrictions of the Gaullist state, abolishing the death penalty and removing state control of the media; but he was party to a notorious act of international piracy, the sinking of the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior in the harbour at Auckland, New Zealand, in which a Greenpeace activist was killed.

Reelected in 1988, he pledged to follow a policy that was neither too left, nor too right. Known as the "*ni-ni*" policy ("neither nor" policy), this was frequently interpreted as being tantamount to no policy at all, and led to a crushing defeat for the Socialists in the 1993 general elections, as France's economic situation declined.

Modèle français, le : The French socio-economic system, which for a long time was seen by the majority of people in France, of all political persuasions, as being more caring, more egalitarian, and preferable to the other major western socio-economic system, known to the French as *le modèle anglo-saxon* (and considered too **libéral**).. However, since the start of the 21st century, the shine has come off the concept of *le modèle français*, as a result of France's major social problems, including ethnic tensions (see les **Banlieues**) and unemployment, and economic problems.

- MoDem – Mouvement Démocrate** : Centrist social-democratic political party formed from the remains of the old UDF by former minister and presidential candidate François Bayrou, in 2007.
- Monde, Le** . The leading French quality daily national [newspaper](#), filling in France a role occupied in the UK by the Times and the Guardian . Politically left of centre, it is a newspaper of informed discussion and debate on current affairs, economics, politics and social issues, and is the newspaper of the Establishment, the "paper of reference", read by large numbers of decision makers, notably in the civil service. It is published in Paris, and comes out every evening. **Monde de l'éducation** : Education supplement of the daily newspaper *Le Monde*; the nearest French equivalent to the Times Educational Supplement.
- Monde Diplomatique, le** . Monthly supplement of Le Monde, devoted to critical analysis of political and economic issues. Though read by people of all shades of opinion in the French establishment and higher echelons of public service, le Monde Diplomatique, the paper, which defines itself as a "paper of opinion", is distinctly anti-neoliberal, and as such a firm critic of unbridled economic liberalism and consumerism. The paper is published worldwide, in 71 editions and 27 languages, and is seen to represent a certain French view, refusing subservience to the hegemony of American thought and policy in the fields of social and economic affairs.
- Monoprix** - Long-established chain of city-centre supermarkets / department stores, present in most French cities and large towns. the chain currently belongs to the Casino retail group,.
- Mont Blanc, tunnel du** : Road tunnel under Mont Blanc, in the French alps, linking France and Italy. The tunnel is a vital transalpine link, and was opened in 1965. In 1999, it was closed following a major fire, in which 56 people lost their lives. It has since reopened, following major improvements to safety systems
- Mont Blanc**. Mountain in the French Alps, near **Chamonix**. The highest peak in France and in Western Europe, altitude 4807 metres. The Mont Blanc range has the distinction of being home to the only real glacier in Western Europe, the **Mer de Glace**. The peak of Mont Blanc is on the Franco-Italian border(See also **Mont Blanc, tunnel du**)
- Mont Saint Michel** - One of France's major tourist sites, and a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Mont St. Michel is a medieval abbey perched on a rock jutting up in the middle of the sand flats and shallow water of a large bay on the north coast of France, between [Normandy](#) and [Brittany](#).
- Mont d'Or** : One of the famous cheeses of the **Franche Comté** region, Mont d'Or, also known as **Vacherin**, is a cheese that was traditionally only available in winter and spring. See under [Cheeses](#).
- Montagne, La** - Regional newspaper covering the [Massif Central](#) area of central southern France. Published in Clermont Ferrand.
- Montmartre** - small hill in the north of Paris, site of the Sacré Coeur basilica, and narrow streets reputed as the capital's artists' quarter.
- Montparnasse, Gare** - One of the main railway termini in Paris, serving much of central western France. the Gare Montparnasse is the Paris terminus for all western TGV lines. See [rail travel in France](#)
- Morvan** : northern spur of the Central Massif, between the Loire and the Seine, in the region of Burgundy. Highest point, le Haut Folin (901 metres). The Morvan is a Regional Natural Park (*Parc naturel Régional*, q.v.).
- Mouvement pour la France - MPF** : Right-wing political party, considered rather more respectable than the [Front National](#) . Though defending many of the same values as the FN, the RPF recuses the term 'nationalist', preferring '*souverainiste*' - or 'sovereignist'. The MPF derives an aura of respectability from its leader, Philippe de [Villiers](#), the aristocratic and popular President of the General Council of the

Vendée department, formerly a member of the UDF party, and a minister in the second [Chirac](#) government. Thanks to various electoral alliances, and to its popularity in the Vendée region, the MPF has been able to maintain a presence in national and European parliaments, currently having two Députés in the National Assembly. The MPF is a very conservative party standing for traditional Christian values; though Eurosceptic, it does not call for France's withdrawal from the EU.

Municipales, élections. Local elections taking place every six years, to elect a mayor and municipal council for each of France's 36,000 [communes](#)

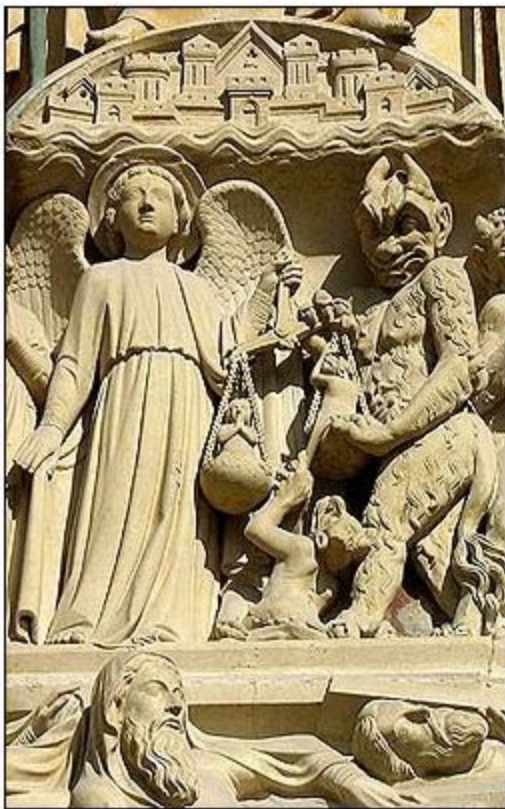
Munster - A fairly strong rind-washed soft cheese from the Vosges mountains in Eastern France. Munster is definitely not a cheese for those who do not like strong tasting varieties. More details under [Cheeses](#).

Mutuelle: Mutual society, cooperative, particularly in the field of insurance, banking or health cover.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

N



What is a *numero vert* ? Or what are the functions of a *notaire*? Here are the answers to these and other questions about French words or names beginning with N.

N.C. See **Nouvelle Calédonie**

Navigo: Carte Navigo - The electronic smart-card system used for travel concessions on the public transport systems of the Ile de France ([Paris](#)) region. Navigo cards can be applied for free online. Alternatively, "Navigo découverte" (Navigo discovery) cards can be purchased for 5 € at metro stations and other approved points of sale. A passport-style photo is required. Anyone can apply for a card, there are no local residence requirements. The card can then be credited for weekly, monthly or annual use, providing ticketless transport on all or parts of the Ile de France public transport network (buses, metro, RER, suburban trains). Sample prices: in October 2019, a day pass for travel in zones 1 and 2 cost 7.50 Euros, a month's pass covering zones 1-4 cost 75.20 €. Navigo fully replaced the Paris [Carte Orange](#) travel cards in 2010. The system is similar to London's Oyster card system.

NF: Normes Francaises. The NF label on a product means that it complies with French standards. See **AFNOR**.

Niches fiscales : a raft of tax avoidance mechanisms designed to allow those with high income to pay little or no income tax, thanks to careful investment in a range of fiscally attractive niches, including investment in French overseas territories, small firms, newbuild property for rent, the French cinema, and many more. The reduction of *niches fiscales* is seen as one of the means of bringing down France's massive mountain of debt.

Nids de poule : expression sometimes seen on road signs in France, translating literally 'hen's nests', but meaning that there are potholes in the road.

NMPP : Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne : NMPP , former name, until 2009, of [Prestalis](#) .

Nord– Pas-de-Calais : The northernmost region of France, and after the Ile de France (Paris) region, the most populated. The region lies between Belgium, the North Sea/Channel coast, and Picardy. Capital [Lille](#). See [Nord Pas de Calais area guide](#)

Nord, Gare du. Paris mainline railway terminus, serving destinations in central northern and northeast France, including Amiens, Lille and Valenciennes. It is also the Paris terminus for Eurostar services to London, and Thalys high-speed services to Brussels, Amsterdam and beyond. See [rail travel](#) .

Normandie : historic region in the middle of Northern France, between Brittany and Picardy. Today, the historic area of Normandy is divided into two administrative regions, Basse Normandie (capital Caen) and Haute Normandie (capital Rouen). For further details see [Normandy regional guide](#) .

Notables: Local VIPs, people with considerable power or influence in local affairs, either through election or through connections. See **Elites**.

Notaire : A notaire is a type of solicitor or notary, whose function is to formalise procedures, usually on behalf of private individuals; these include conveyancing (buying and selling property), the drawing up of wills and testaments, drawing up contracts of marriage. Notaries are self-employed professionals, holding public office.

Notat, Nicole : Born 1947, former leader (1992 - 2002) of the large **CFDT** Trade Union, the first woman to attain such a senior position in the world of French trade unionism. As a union leader, she was remarkably open to dialogue, and as such was considered as weak by more militant hard-liners.

Notre Dame de Paris : the cathedral of Paris, one of the finest medieval gothic cathedrals in the world, located on the Ile de la Cité, in the heart of Paris. The cathedral suffered from a major fire in April 2019, and is currently closed for extensive renovation. See [Paris tourist attractions](#).

Nourrice : also called Nounous or Gardes d'enfants, are unofficial child minders, not officially recognized but allowed to look after babies in their or the parents' home.

Nouvel Observateur : See [Obs](#)

Nouvelle Calédonie: French overseas territory in the south Pacific

November 11th , le Onze novembre : Armistice day (World War I), a national holiday in France.

NRJ (Pronounced *Energie*) : one of the first, and now one of the biggest, private music radio stations in France. NRJ was founded in 1991, immediately following the liberalisation of broadcasting by the newly elected president François **Mitterrand**.

Numéro azur : National phone number for which all calls are charged at local rates (the difference being paid by the company or the organisation, not the caller).

Numéro vert (green number). A toll-free phone number, usually starting with the prefix 0800. Other special rate phone numbers include the numéro azur (0801 or 0810), charged at local rate, and numéro indigo (0802 0820 0803 or 0830) charged at premium rates



An A-Z Dictionary of France

O



What happened at *Oradour sur Glane* ? And what was the OAS ? And what exactly does Oc signify? And what is the Musée d'Orsay about ? Answers to these and many other questions in this "O" section of the dictionary of France

A	B	C		E	F	G	H	I
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	
R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

OAS - Organisation de l'Armée Secrète - Secret army set up by French right-wing activists in Algeria in 1961, in the hope of stopping the process of decolonisation and independence. The main leader of the movement was General Salan. In 1961 and 1962, the OAS was responsible for a campaign of bombings and assassinations in France and Algeria, targeting people in favour of independence. After the **Evian agreements**, paving the way for independence, the OAS tried in vain to provoke the remaining French colons into insurrection, through more bloody acts of terrorism, culminating in an assassination attempt on DeGaulle at Petit-Clamart, in the south-west suburbs of Paris . After the violence, hundreds of ex-members of the OAS were tried and found guilty, and three were sentenced to death. In an attempt at national reconciliation, many of those who were jailed were later amnestied.

Obélix - Cartoon character. A rather strong but overweight Gaulish villager, the sidekick of [Astérix](#) in the eponymous [bande dessinée](#) or cartoon series.

Obs - L'Obs is the title taken by the newsmagazine le **Nouvel Observateur** in Autumn 2014, to mark its fiftieth anniversary. Le Nouvel Observateur, now l'Obs, is a left-leaning weekly newsmagazine. Since 2000, along with much of the print press in France, it has suffered from falling readership. In early 2014 it was bought by a trio of investors including Xavier Niel, the millionaire founder and boss of France's very successful independent internet and phone company Free.fr.

Oc : the language traditionally spoken in the south of France, notably in the Languedoc (meaning Language of Oc region). Occitanian languages, the family of Oc languages (for it is more than just a single tongue), were historically spoken in "Occitania"(see below) from the Atlantic to the southern Alps, from parts of Spain to the Val d'Aosta in Italy. Oc languages include Provençal. Linguistically they are close to Catalan, the traditional language of Catalonia in Spain and the Pyrénées Orientales department of France.

Occasion : sign often seen on objects for sale. It just means 'second hand', or 'used'.

Occitanie - Historic. Occitania, the southern area of France, from the Atlantic to the southern Alps, but also including parts of Spain to the Val d'Aosta in Italy, where the Occitanian language, Occitan or langue d'oc, was formerly spoken.

Occitanie - Region The name chosen for the new region, capital [Toulouse](#), that came into existence at the start of 2016 with the merging of [Midi Pyrénées](#) and [Languedoc Roussillon](#).

Ockrent, Christine : Born 1944, a Belgian journalist who became one of the most important television news and current-affairs presenters on French television. After working in the USA on CBS News's 60-Minutes programme, Ockrent returned to France, where in 1981 she became the first woman to serve as anchor on one of the main evening news programmes on French TV, the 8 p.m. (**Vingt heures**) news on the state TV channel **Antenne 2** (now called **France 2**). Although she became the most respected of France's evening TV news anchors, she left to become Director of the commercial channel **TF1**. In the following years, she was editor of **l'Express** newsmagazine, then returned to chair current affairs programmes on television, notably the very popular and long-running France-Europe Express. She is the partner of the former French Foreign Secretary, Bernard **Kouchner**.

Oil pollution , see under individual entries **Amoco Cadiz**, **Erika**, **Prestige**

O.L. - Olympique Lyonnaise - Famous French football team, from the city of [Lyon](#), one of the top teams in French football, having won the League championship seven times in a row, and also the Coupe de France in 2008 and 2012. Lyon's Olympique stadium was the venue for a semi final and the final of the 2019 Women's World cup.

O.M. - Olympique de Marseille - First division French football club, from the city of [Marseille](#), with a chequered history. One of the few French clubs to have won a major international competition (Champions' League, 1993), OM was retrograded to the second division in 1994, following a match-fixing scandal. Back in the first division since 1996, they have since had mixed fortunes. Among other achievements, they were runners up in the UEFA Cup in 1999, 2004 and 2018; they came top of the French First League in 2010, and were runners-up in 2006, 2007 and 2017.

ONF - Office National des Forêts : the French government agency responsible for overseeing French forests and forestry; the French equivalent of the UK's Forestry Commission, or the US Forest Service.

ONG - Organisme non gouvernemental; an NGO.

Onze novembre, Le - See November 11th. A public holiday in France.

OPA - Offre public d'achat. In the corporate world, a takeover bid.

Opéra Bastille - large modern opera house in Paris, located on the Place de la Bastille, and opened in 1989, to mark the bicentenary of the falling of the Bastille, during the French Revolution.

Opéra Garnier - The original Paris opera house, located place de l'Opéra, in the 9th Arrondissement. Designed by the architect Garnier, it was opened in 1862, and is one of the finest examples of a nineteenth-century opera house anywhere in the world.

Opération escargot – 'Operation snail'. Name given to protest actions periodically undertaken by French lorry-drivers (and occasionally taxi-drivers), as a demonstration of their griefs, such as the cost of fuel or the tax burden. It involves driving groups of lorries very slowly along main routes, blocking all the traffic behind them.

Oradour sur Glane : A village in the Limousin region that was the site of a massacre by Waffen-SS troops in 1944. 642 villagers were murdered, and the village set on fire, in reprisal for the alleged capture by the Resistance of a German officer. After the war, General de Gaulle demanded that the remains of the village be left as they were after the massacre, and that is how the village remains to this day, fixed in time, a memorial to the atrocities of war.

Orange : Orange is the name of the main telecoms operator in France, which was formerly the state owned [France Télécom](#), and was the historic provider of telephone services in France, both landlines and mobile. Today Orange is France's largest telephone company, and the

fourth largest in Europe.

The Orange brand started life in the UK as the mobile phone network of a company called Microtel. To run their network Microtel set up a new company called Orange PLC. Microtel operations were eventually acquired by Vodaphone, who then had to sell off Orange as they could not have two mobile phone licences. Orange's worldwide operations were bought by France Telecom, who subsequently chose the name Orange as their single corporate brand, phasing out the France Télécom brand name in France in 2012. In 2018 Orange still had just over 40% of the landline and mobile phone markets in France, and is responsible for the upkeep of all the ungrouped phone lines and exchanges in France. It operates phone services in over thirty countries

In 2019, the French government, which originally had a majority shareholding in France Télécom, remained Orange's largest shareholder, but with only 22% of the capital.

Ordonnance, une : 1) A prescription for medicines or specialist treatment, written out by a doctor; an ordonnance is required for the purchase of most medicines, except over-the-counter products such as aspirin or sore-throat tablets. See [medical treatment in France](#). 2) Generally speaking, any public order issued by the authorities.

Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur : See **Légion d'honneur**.

Oréal, l': See **L'Oréal**.

Orly The name of the second airport (at one time the principal airport) of Paris. orly is situated in the southwest suburbs of the capital, and can be reached by the RER express transit rail link via the station at Antony, and a connection to Orlyval, a driverless automatic light-rail system. Orly long had two terminals, *Orly Sud*, the biggest, and *Orly Ouest*. Since 2019, Orly Sud has been smoit into two terminals, Orly 1 and Orly 2, a new Terminal 3 has been opened, and Orly Ouest has become Terminal 4. TThe airport is mainly used for French domestic flights, plus flights to southern Europe and north Africa, as well as by some low cost airlines. There are a few long-haul flights, including a newly introduced Orly-JFK service with Air France, and new routes to Las Vegas, Newark and Montreal operated by Level. See [Paris airports](#) information

Orsay, Musée d' : French museum of the nineteenth century, housed in the dramatic nineteenth century setting of the old Gare d'Orsay, on the **left bank** of the **Seine** in **Paris**. Notably home to France's finest collection of Impressionist paintings.

Orsec, le plan : name given to emergency contingency operations that may need to be launched by a local Prefecture, in the event of a natural or human disaster. The word is an acronym, notably for **Organisation des Secours**, (Organising aid).

ORTF- Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française - The French broadcasting authority, from 1964 to 1974. An autonomous agency, it was modelled, by General de Gaulle, on the BBC. it was dismantled in 1974, when the various divisions that it previously included, such as the state TV channel Antenne 2, became autonomous bodies in their own right.

Ouest France : France's biggest-selling daily newspaper, with a circulation of almost 800,000 - which puts it well ahead of any other French daily, whether regional or national. It is produced in Rennes, Brittany, and distributed in the [Brittany](#), [Normandy](#), and [Pays de la Loire](#) regions of France. See article on [Newspapers in France](#).

OVNI - pronounced "of-nee". *Objets volants non identifiés* - or in English UFO's.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

P



Photo above: French car manufacturer **Peugeot** has a long history

Who are the *Partenaires sociaux* in France? And what is a *PME* ? Or what is a *PV* ? And where is *Picardy* ?

Answers to these and other questions on this page of the dictionary of France.

P.V. : see [Procès Verbal](#) below.

PACA - Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur : south eastern region of France, lying between the Rhone valley and the Italian border. Capital Marseille. This region includes the historic region of Provence, plus the French Riviera and southern Alps, and stretches from the Rhone valley in the west to the Italian border in the east. It is bordered on the north by the region of Rhône-Alpes, and on the south by the Mediterranean sea. It consists of the departments of Bouches du Rhône, Var, Vaucluse, Alpes Maritimes and Alpes de Haute Provence.

See [regional guide to Provence](#) .

PACS *Pacte Civile de Solidarité*. In legal and fiscal terms, a contract of civil partnership including most of the features of a marriage contract, but open to both heterosexual and homosexual couples. While originally introduced in 1999 to allow same-sex couples to formalise their union, ten years later, in 2009, over 90% of couples signing up to a PACS were heterosexual.

Pacte Civile de Solidarité, see **PACS**.

PAF - Paysage Audiovisuel Français - term used to describe the structure, or 'landscape', of TV and radio broadcasting in France

Panthéon - Former church of St. Genevieve, in the 5th Arrondissement of **Paris**, next to the Sorbonne. One of the finest neo-classical churches in Europe, it has been used, since the French Revolution, as the burying place for many of the great of the nation, "les Immortels", including Voltaire, Victor Hugo and Emile Zola.

Parc Astérix, see [Astérix](#)

Parc National: National Park, protected natural area. There are six National Parks in Metropolitan France: French National Parks are characterised by their structure, since they are divided into two areas. At the centre of the Park lies a highly protected area, where visitors are discouraged, known as the heart (Coeur du Parc); outside this heart lies the peripheral area (called Aire d'Adhésion), which people are free to visit at leisure.

Parc Naturel Régional: A regional area of outstanding natural beauty, or environmental value. Natural Regional Parks are frequently but erroneously described as National Parks; it is however true to say that the environmental constraints and legislation applied in many Natural Regional Parks are similar to those applied in the peripheral areas of National Parks, or in non-wilderness national parks in other countries (such as Exmoor in the U.K.). There is no intrinsic reason why the "Cevennes" hills should have the status of National Park, but the "Parc des Volcans" just north of them be designated as a regional park; but that is the way it is. As "regional parks", the PNRs are the responsibility of the regions, not of the state.

Paris : the French capital city, on the river Seine. ► See [Paris](#)

Paris Match: Popular French weekly newsmagazines, Paris Match was founded in 1949. Originally a photonews magazine, concentrating more on well illustrated reports on national and international affairs, it has progressively moved in the direction of a showbiz and people magazine, though with a particular interest in the private lives of politicians and other public figures.

Paris-Nice : One of the great annual cycling races in France

Paritarism : a French democratic principle, whereby many important decisions in the world of business or public affairs must be taken by a *commission paritaire*, in which different interested parties (such as employees and employers, or the administration and users of a service) are represented, and have certain decision-making powers.

Parlement. The French Parliament, made up of the **Senate** and the **National Assembly**.

Partenaires sociaux : The various supposedly representative bodies that must by law be consulted during the preparatory phase of certain types of social and industrial legislation, and together manage certain institutions such as parts of the social security system. In short, the partenaires sociaux can be described as lobbies or pressure groups, representing on the one hand employers, and on the other hand trade unions. It can be argued that trade unions are not "representative" bodies in modern France, where union membership is down to just 7% of the workforce. Yet they continue to play a major role as partenaires sociaux, and in the absence of any more representative body, will doubtless continue to do so.

Partie civile; as in "*se constituer partie civile*". Legal expression. The concept does not exist in English or American law. A *partie civile* is a private party, individual or group, suing for damages or redress against the accused, in the context of a criminal prosecution brought by the public prosecutor (*le procureur*).

Pasqua, Charles born 1927 : French conservative politician, Minister of the Interior (home secretary) from 1986 to 1988, and again from 1993 to 1995. Pasqua enjoyed the reputation of being a hard-line no-nonsense conservative

Pasteur, Institut - Famous private medical and biological research institute, founded in 1887, by Louis Pasteur, the man who discovered the technique of vaccination. The institute is one of the world's leading research laboratories in its field, and was the first to identify the HIV virus. Pasteur researchers have received the Nobel Prizes on eight occasions.

Pastis: Aniseed-flavoured beverages have long been popular in France, particularly since the banning, for health reasons in 1915, of the popular and similar drink Absinthe. To this day, Pastis, of which there are two main brands, Pernod and Ricard, is still a very popular apéritif, particularly in the south of France. Pastis, which is a translucent amber colour when in the bottle, is generally diluted with about five parts of water, before being drunk. On dilution, it becomes a cloudy cream colour.

Pâté de foie gras : See **Foie gras**.

Patron: the word basically means the person in charge, and *not* a patron. Thus, the *patron* in a business context is the boss, and in a restaurant is the manager or owner. *Les Patrons* in the plural, or *le patronat*, means company directors. See also **MEDEF**.

Patrouille de France : the aerobatic display unit of the French airforce, similar to the UK's Red Arrows.

Paysan : This word is commonly used in contemporary French, and is not usually pejorative like the English word "peasant". It simply means 'small farmer'. A synonym is *agriculteur*.

PCF, Parti Communiste Français: the French communist party, which in the late sixties was the principal party of the left in French politics, receiving over 20% of the popular vote. It has been in decline since the end of the Cold War. See [Political Parties in France](#)

PEA Plan d'Epargne en Actions : an investment portfolio savings account, in which holdings can be bought and sold without incurring capital gains tax until the account is closed.

Péage, section à péage: toll, or a section of toll road, on motorways or occasionally on bridges.

PEE See [Poste d'expansion Economique](#)

PEEP : the *Fédération des Parents d'élèves de l'Enseignement Public* is the second largest parents association in the state education system in France, with some 300,000 members (2008). Though it has almost as many members, it has far fewer delegates elected to school boards than the largest federation, the [FCPE](#). The PEEP is generally reputed to be a right-wing, or conservative parent's association.

PEL Plan d'Epargne Logement: Savings account which, on closure, provides a loan at preferential rates for home-buyers, dependent on the amount of savings in the account and the time for which they have been held.

Pen, le. See [Le Pen](#)

Permis, le: Permit or licence or authorisation. The word is often used as a contraction of "*permis de conduire*", meaning a driving licence or drivers license. *Passer le permis* means to sit one's driving test. Do not confuse *Permis de conduire* with *Permis de construire*, which means a building permit.

Pernod-Ricard : In 2008, with the acquisition of a Swedish company, Pernod-Ricard became the world's leading wines and spirits company. The original founding companies of the group, Pernod and Ricard, are the two main manufacturers of **Pastis**.

Pétain, Maréchal Philippe . A First World War national hero, Pétain was called to the rescue to form an "independent" government for the "free" southern half of France, while the north was under direct Nazi occupation. At the end of the war, members of Pétain's "collaborationist" Vichy government were arrested and put on trial for helping the Nazis; Pétain himself was condemned to death, but his sentence was reduced to life imprisonment, on account of his age and his earlier stature.

Pétanque. The most popular form of the game known as *boules*, pétanque is the French version of the English game of bowls. It has been played in a fairly similar form since Roman times, and is particularly popular in the south of France. The modern game is played on a gravel surface using solid metal *boules* about the size of a tennis ball. Unlike in the English game where the balls are rolled, in pétanque they are usually lobbed. The aim of the game is to get one's *boule* as close as possible to the jack, known as the *cochonnet* in French. Though the game can be played on any patch of gravel surface, many towns have special *boules* areas known as *boulodromes*.

Petit déjeuner: Breakfast, *à la française*. The classic French breakfast consists of a mug or bowl of café-au-lait or hot chocolate, with tartines – bread, butter and jam – or croissants. In the last thirty years, cereals have also made their appearance on the breakfast table in a big way. It is very unusual for people in France to take a cooked breakfast, and hot dishes are not usually provided, even in hotels.

Peugeot : One of France's major automobile manufacturers. Peugeot, whose roots are in Montbéliard, in the [Franche Comté](#) region of eastern France, is today part of the PSA Peugeot-Citroën group, and is one of the biggest car manufacturers in Europe.

Pharmacie de garde : in most French towns, there is a pharmacie de garde, a chemists (pharmacists) shop that remains open at night and at weekends to deal with emergencies. the job rotates among chemists shops in a given area, and the address of the pharmacie which is "de garde" is normally indicated at weekends in each chemists shop.

Philippe, Edouard. Born 1970. Since 2017, prime minister of France, under president Macron. A socialist in his youth and early career, Edouard Philippe later joined the conservative UMP Party to work with moderate Conservative leader Alain [Juppé](#), a former prime minister. He was elected as mayor of Le Havre on the [UMP](#) ticket. He was part of Juppé's team in the runup to the 2017 presidential election, and began by supporting François [Fillon](#) when the latter won the primary. However he quit the Fillon campaign when Fillon was accused of financial irregularities, and privately expressed support for Emmanuel [Macron](#), the former economy minister in the Socialist government of François [Hollande](#), who was running for the presidency on a cross-party ticket.

Picardie - [Picardy](#) : Picardie is a former region in northern France, lying between the Paris region and the English Channel. Its capital is Amiens. It is now part of the larger region of Hauts de France.

Pierre, l'Abbé 1912 - 2007 - Born Henri Grouès, Abbé Pierre (Abbot Pierre) was a French cleric, and founder of the Communautés d'Emmaüs, associations for the reinsertion of long-term unemployed and social misfits. He also founded the Abbé-Pierre Foundation, to provide housing for the socially excluded. He was by all accounts the most famous and popular Catholic priest of his generation in France, and was respected by all for his unceasing battle for human rights and dignity, and against social exclusion, and homelessness. When he died in 2007, it was suggested that he should receive a state funeral; but his supporters and family requested just a "national homage". His funeral was celebrated in Notre Dame cathedral, in the presence of President Chirac and former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and thousands lined the route of his funeral procession.

Pigalle - the red light district of Paris, at the foot of Montmartre. It is famous for its bars, striptease joints and cabarets, such as the world-famous Moulin Rouge.

PJ – (sometimes written *Pégie*) See under **Police Nationale**

p.j. - In an email, *pièce jointe*, or attachment.

Pivot, Bernard - Born 1935. French intellectual, literary critic, and presenter of a number of erudite but popular cultural programmes on French television, notably *Apostrophes* and *Bouillon de Culture*. In 2004, he was elected to the Goncourt Academy, the first non-author to receive this honour.

Plan DSK - Special type of savings and investment account, launched by Dominique Strauss Kahn, former socialist Finance Minister, and former (2008-2011) president of the International Monetary Fund.

Plan social - A redundancy limitation plan. Any firm larger than 50 employees that wishes or needs to lay off more than 10 employees is obliged to draw up a *plan social* aimed at limiting the number of redundancies and finding alternative opportunities for those that are laid off. A *plan social* must be drawn up following discussions between management and workforce representatives. It must be approved by the Labour Inspectorate (Inspection du travail) and may be challenged in court by employees, as often happens.

Platini, Michel, Footballer, captain of the French national team from 1979 to 1987, and team manager from 1988 to 1992. Platini played for the French first division clubs of Nancy and Saint-Etienne, before moving on to an international career at Juventus. He later went on to serve as chairman of UEFA.

PLM - Compagnie des Chemins de fer de Paris à Lyon et à la Méditerranée - the name of the most famous French railway company, which became part of the national SNCF in 1938.

PMA *Procréation médicalement assisté* - Assisted reproductive technology. PMA has been available in France since 2004 as a means of getting round infertility issues. In 2018 it accounted for some 3% of births in France. In 2018 and 2019 PMA has been a hotly debated issue

as new legislation is put forward to open the process up to same-sex couples

PME - PMI - *Petites et moyennes entreprises, petites et moyennes industries*, the French designation of companies that, in English, would be referred to as 'small firms', or 'small and medium-sized companies', or - using the Euro-English expression formed from the French expression, 'SME's'. A *petite entreprise* is a company with less than 50 employees and a turnover of less than 10 million euros, and a *moyenne entreprise* is one with between 50 and 250 employees and a turnover not exceeding 50 million euros.

PMU : Centralised horse-race betting system. France does not have off-course bookmakers. Betting is done in cafés displaying the PMU logo.

Pohér, Alain : (1909 - 1996) - Interim president of France following the resignation of General de Gaulle in 1969, and again following the death of Georges Pompidou in 1974. He acceded to the Presidency in his function of leader of Sénat, the the upper house in the French parliament.

Point, Le - Popular French weekly newsmagazine, founded in 1972 by a breakaway group of journalists from L'Express (q.v.). Very similar in presentation and look to l'Express, it is now established as one of the leading French political and general interest weeklies. In political terms it is centre-right, and in recent years has been a strident voice in favour of major reforms in French society and the economy.

Poivre d'Arvor, Patrick - see PPDA below.

Pole Emploi: the French network of Job Centres, or employment centres, created in January 2009 from the merger of the former [ANPE](#) and the [Assédic](#).

Police: There are three main types of police in France, the Police Nationale (a civilian force), the Gendarmerie (a branch of the armed services), and the Police Municipale (local structures). The first two are national forces, under the control of the Interior Ministry. See individual entries for each service.

Police Municipale (see also Police) : Local police forces, under the orders of the local mayor, Municipal Police exist to ensure the maintenance of order in towns and cities, and the application of local bylaws. They have traffic duties, civil protection duties (often on bicycles), and community liaison operations. They also carry out certain legal and administrative formalities for citizens, in municipal offices. They can issue fines and parking tickets, and take statements.

Police Nationale (see also Police) : The main national police force in France. The principal remit of the Police National in France is the maintenance of law and order in French towns and cities (In rural areas, this is the responsibility of the Gendarmerie (q.v.)). The National Police force comprises six main operational divisions: Public security (the DCSP), by far the largest division, and responsible for everyday policing duties. The riot police (CRS, Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité), the Police Judiciaire (PJ, or "Pégie"), responsible for criminal investigations, the border police (Police aux Frontières), the Police training service, and the surveillance department, known since 2008 as the DCRI (Direction Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur).

Polynésie Française, see **French Polynesia**

Polmar, plan Plan d'intervention contre la **Pollution Maritime** : contingency plan that can be rapidly applied in the event of any serious incident of marine pollution, such as an oil spillage, off or on the French coastline.

Polytechnique - One of the most prestigious and selective of France's "Grandes Ecoles", to all intents and purposes a super-university, which ranks among the best in the world. See [Higher Education in France](#)

Pompidou, Georges(1911 - 1974) President of France from 1969 until his death in 1974, successor to General de Gaulle. Conservative (Gaullist) Prime minister 1962-1968. The Pompidou years were the final phase of the truly Gaullist Fifth Republic; Pompidou was succeeded (after the brief caretaker presidency of Alain [Poher](#)) by Valéry [Giscard d'Estaing](#) who, although a conservative, was an Independent Republican, not a member of the Gaullist party.

Pompidou Centre - Centre Georges Pompidou : Also known popularly as "*Beaubourg*". Located on Place Beaubourg, in the Marais district of Central Paris, the *Centre Pompidou* is one of the most visited museums in Paris, thanks to its collection of modern and contemporary European art, and its large public reference library with facilities for over 2,000 readers, its theatres and its lecture rooms. The glass steel and concrete building, designed by the Richard Rogers partnership, and opened in 1977, is one of the most remarkable examples of 1970's architecture. It is distinguished by having most of its service infrastructure (lifts, escalators, utility ducts) on the outside of the building. In 2010, a satellite of the Pompidou Centre opened in the city of Metz, in [Lorraine](#). This brand-new museum shows a selection of works from the Paris collection, including some of the finest, and also stages its own exhibitions.

Pompiers: The French fire service or fire brigade. In rural France, les pompiers are the front-line emergency service, providing a rapid response to all kinds of accident, from fires to people breaking a leg on a hike. There are thousands of local fire brigades staffed by volunteers trained in first aid and essential rescue techniques; they are usually first on the spot in any rural emergency. They will be aided by professionals from the nearest town, if this is necessary. Urban fire services are staffed by full-time professionals.

Pont l'Eveque - a type of soft [cheese](#) manufactured in Normandy; it is not unlike a square version of Camembert

Pont. A **pont** is a working day that happens to fall between a public holiday, **jour férié**, and a weekend. For example, if the **Quatorze Juillet** were a Tuesday, millions of French employees would "*faire le pont*" by taking the Monday off and making a long weekend .

Population: In 2001 the population of France was 60.7 million inhabitants, with an average density of 107 people per square kilometre, close to the European average. France contains 52 urban areas of over 150,000 inhabitants, the five largest being **Paris** (9.8 million), **Lyons** (1.4 million), **Marseille/Aix en Provence** (1.4 million), **Lille** (1.1 million) and **Toulouse** (0.9 million).

Porte de Versailles : one of the historic gates of the city of Paris, and now the location of the capital's main exhibition ground, the site of many of France's most important consumer and trade shows, known in French as "*salons*". One of the biggest annual events is the *Salon de l'Agriculture*.

POS - Plan d'Occupation des Sols - zoning or planning regulations applicable in a town or **commune**, specifying the type of building or construction acceptable in given areas - residential, commercial, industrial, none at all, or mixed. POS are supposed to be phased out and replaced by PLU's (local urban plans), but the changeover is not yet underway.

Poste, la. The French post office and mail delivery service. A nationalised service, today's La Poste was known, until recently, as *les PTT, Poste, Télégraphe et Télécommunications*; the PTT was divided up into its two principal constituents, the postal service and telecommunications, in order to prepare **France Telecom** for partial privatisation. La Poste benefits from a national monopoly in delivery of letters, but has become increasingly subject to competition from specialised companies for the delivery of parcels, and has now been transformed into a private company (S.A.). La Poste also runs a banking service, known as the Banque Postale (formerly the CCP).

Poste d'Expansion Economique (PEE) Name given to the Commercial Services of French diplomatic missions - embassies, consulates - abroad. French trade commissions.

Pousse-café: See under [Marc](#).

PPDA, Patrick Poivre d'Arvor - Long time anchor of the main evening news programme on TF1 television, Poivre d'Arvor was for many years France's most respected and trusted newsreader. He was replaced, amid much controversy, in 2009, by Laurence Ferrari.

Précarité, les Précaires : Literally 'precarity', people in a precarious situation. The word *précaires* is used to describe people in France who live in a precarious working or social environment. The words are particularly, though not only, used in the language of the far left, for whom *la précarité* is seen as the byproduct of liberal economics, an inadmissible situation, applicable to anyone who does not have a secure job, a decent place to live, or enough money.

Préfecture (see also **Préfet**). Residence of a **Préfet** (Prefect), and building housing local offices of national government services. The word is also used to denote the chief town or capital of a Department or a region. For example, the city of Montpellier is described as the "Préfecture" of the department of Hérault, and the "Préfecture de région" for the [Languedoc-Roussillon region](#) .

Préfet (see also **Préfet de Police**, **Préfet Maritime**): the Prefect, the chief representative of central government in a French department. His official residence is the Préfecture. Until the Decentralisation Law of 1982, the Prefect was the appointed chief executive of local government in each department and region of France; since decentralisation, and the passing of powers and financial responsibilities to departmental and regional councils , the role of prefects has been greatly diminished. Nonetheless, Prefects retain considerable powers in matters of public order, immigration, and emergencies. The prefect is also responsible for the organisation of territorial and national elections, and for ensuring that local authorities do not exceed their powers, but act within the framework of the law. Prefects are in theory required to be a-political and neutral, but many appointments are politically inspired.

Préfet Maritime: A special **Prefect**, in charge of France's coastal waters. Responsible for policing, coastal defence, environmental protection, and the general administration of coastal waters. There are three préfets maritimes, based in Cherbourg, Brest and Toulon.

Prélèvement: (banking) : Direct debit. Suppliers of ongoing services (utilities, insurance etc.) which are billed for varying amounts according to consumption, frequently suggest payment by *prélèvement*.

Premier Mai - May 1st, Labour Day, a public holiday in France, marked by processions in most towns, organised by trade unions.

Premier Ministre. The role of Prime Minister in France is not the same as that of the Prime Minister of Britain. While the British Prime Minister is politically (though not constitutionally) Britain's head of state, the French Prime Minister is only the head of the French government, and nominated as such by the President. Weekly meetings of the French cabinet (see **Conseil des Ministres**) are therefore presided over by the **President**, not by the Prime Minister. When President and Prime Minister are of the same political leaning ("left" or "right"), government policy will tend to be lead by the two; when they are from different political families (a situation known as **cohabitation**), the Prime Minister's role and decision-making power are considerably strengthened. The Prime Minister is responsible for forming the government, but the list of names has to be approved by the President. See [Balladur](#), [Barre](#), [Chaban Delmas](#), [Chirac](#), [Jospin](#), [Raffarin](#), [Rocard](#), etc.

Première communion : First communion, the French **Catholic** rite of initiation into the faith, corresponding to the ceremony of confirmation in the Anglican church. Traditionally, girls dress in white, and boys in a smart suit for the ceremony.

Prépas: See under **Classes Préparatoires**

President. The head of state, under the constitution of the French Fifth Republic ([Cinquième république](#)) . The French president is elected by direct universal suffrage, for a term of five years in office. Since the [2008 constitutional reform](#) introduced by President [Sarkozy](#), a president may serve no more than two five-year terms in office. Election by universal suffrage was first introduced following a referendum

organised by [General de Gaulle](#) in 1962. Originally the presidential term in office was seven years, with one president, F. [Mitterrand](#), serving a full two terms. With presidential and legislative elections operating according to different calendars, swings in the popularity of parties and their leaders led in the mid eighties to situations or "**Cohabitation**", with presidents and parliamentary majorities from different sides of the political spectrum. In 2002, presidential and legislative elections were held within two months of each other, each leading to five year terms in office for those elected; thus president [Chirac](#) emerged for a second term in office with a solid parliamentary majority of his own supporters.

The president is responsible for choosing his Prime Minister (see **Premier Ministre**), who proposes a team of government ministers which the president must approve. He is the chief of the executive, who oversees weekly cabinet meetings (see **Conseil des ministres**), and promulgates new laws. He is also the commander in chief of French forces. He has the power to dissolve the **National Assembly** and call legislative elections – a power used rather disastrously in 1997 by Jacques [Chirac](#), who dissolved the Assembly in attempt to give his "presidential majority" a rather less slender majority, only to see the **Socialist** opposition voted into power.

In exceptional cases of national emergency, Article 16 of the **Constitution** gives the president the power to rule without the consent of parliament.

See also [Giscard d'Estaing](#), [Pompidou](#)

Prestalis, known until 2009 as **NMPP (Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne)** is a private company holding a virtual monopoly over the distribution of newspapers and magazines in France. Set up in 1947 with the aim of ensuring that all publications so wishing could benefit from guaranteed national or regional distribution, it today distributes over 100 dailies and over 3500 magazines, representing some 80% of the market - to some 29,000 points of sale in France. Prestalis's dominant position in press distribution has its drawbacks; the company has been attacked for abusing its position and for fixing minimum quantity levels for magazine distribution, making its services too costly for many niche market publications. Prestalis is a joint-venture owned by **Hachette** (49%) and France's main magazine publishers.

Priceminister.com Leading French peer-to-peer e-commerce site, founded in 2000.. Used by private individuals as well as distributors offloading surplus stock, the site is a haven for bargain hunters. Growth has been spectacular and by early 2010 the company was employing 200 people at its Paris headquarters, and the website attracting 23 million visits per month. Since 2008 the company has expanded its activities to the UK and Spain.

Prime Minister, see **Premier Ministre**.

Prix littéraires, literary prizes : France has a long history of literary prizes, and today there are dozens of such awards. The oldest and most prestigious is the Prix Goncourt, first awarded in 1903 by the Académie Goncourt, a literary society established according to the terms of the will of the famous nineteenth century critic Edmond de Goncourt. Other famous prizes include the Prix Femina, created in 1904, and the Prix Renaudot, created in 1926.

Procès Verbal (P.V.) : A written record of something, most commonly the written notification of a fine (for instance, a parking ticket), or the minutes of a meeting.

Progrès de Lyon, Le : regional daily newspaper, founded in 1859, published in Lyon, and distributed in Lyon and the surrounding departments. Formerly part of the Hersant media empire, the newspaper currently belongs to the Est Républicain (EBRA) group.

See [Newspapers in France](#).

Promenade des Anglais. The seaside esplanade at **Nice**, on the **Côte d'Azur**. The esplanade took its name in the early nineteenth century, when the little fishing port of Nice (Nissa) began to become popular with the first tourists from England. Whereas the local population had

seen the sea as a source of their livelihood, the first *Anglais* who came to stay saw it as leisure facility, and the sea front as a place to be admired. The beach being pebbly and difficult to walk on, the first tourists chose instead to walk back and forth just above the beach line, thus creating one of the world's first seaside promenades.

Prost, Alain. Racing driver. The most successful French Formula One driver of the second half of the twentieth century.

Protestantism, see also **Eglise Réformée de France**. Since the spread of Protestantism in the 16th century, France has always had a Protestant minority, sometimes tolerated, sometimes persecuted. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 led to a mass exodus of French Protestants (some estimates put the figure as high as a million), to neighbouring countries, and to the New World. Pockets of Protestantism survived in the **Cévennes** mountains of southern France, and in Alsace and the region of Montbéliard, in eastern France. These are France's main Protestant areas today.

Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur - (PACA) South eastern region of France, lying between the Rhone valley and the Italian border. Capital Marseille. See [regional guide to Provence](#)

Prudhommes. Conseils des.. : Local arbitration and conciliation committees, composed of elected representatives of employers and employees, and responsible for passing judgement in cases of workplace litigation, or claims of unfair dismissal.

PS - Parti Socialiste : the French socialist party, formed between 1969 and 1971, from the fusion of existing non-communist left-wing parties in France. Between the seventies and 2017, following the fading of the Communist Party, the PS was the principal party of the left in France, and formed a number of governments, the most recent of which was under the Hollande presidency, from 2012 to 2017. One of the founding members of the party was François [Mitterrand](#), who was President of France from 1981 to 1995. During the presidency of François Hollande, the party became increasingly split between its radical left wing and its social-democratic centre-left faction. Between 2016 and 2017 it achieved a spectacular decline, going from being the party in power to a new position as one of a number of competing left-wing parties. In primary elections to choose a presidential candidate for 2017, party membership chose the left-wing Benoît Hamon; but Hamon had little appeal to the electorate, and could only manage fifth place in the Presidential election, taking just 6.7% of votes. A large number of the party's centrist membership left the P.S. to join Emmanuel Macron's En Marche movement, which then became the centrist LREM party, leaving the Socialists, who had been in power until 2017, as a fringe party of the left. See [Political Parties in France](#)

PSA The holding company of the Peugeot-Citroën automobile group.

PSU Parti Socialiste Unifié . Left-wing political party that existed from 1960 to 1989. On the political spectrum, the PSU was between the Socialists and the Communists, and as such was always a small movement. It's most prominent member was Michel Rocard (q.v.), who later, after joining the Socialist Party, became Prime Minister under François Mitterrand.

PTT, see **Poste, la** above.

P.V. : see **Procès Verbal** above.

Publicis : the biggest and most famous French communications and advertising company, founded in 1926. It is the third largest communications group in the world, and currently owns Saatchi & Saatchi, Bartle Bogle Hegarty, and other major advertising companies.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

Q



A dictionary of France, including institutions, places, significant people, French specialities, and a selection of other useful or intriguing expressions....

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>I</u>
<u>J</u>	<u>K</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>Q</u>	
<u>R</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>V</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Z</u>

QG, Quartier général : headquarters of an operation or force, command post.

Quai d'Orsay - part of the left bank of the River Seine in Paris, in the 7th Arrondissement; location of the French Foreign Office (ministry). By extension, the expression "Le Quai d'Orsay" is used to mean the French Foreign Office, in the same way as "Downing Street" designates the office of the British prime minister.

Quai des Orfèvres : road beside the Seine on the Ile de la Cité, in central Paris, famous as the headquarters of the Paris police. The Paris equivalent of Scotland yard.

Quartier : word implying a district or area of a town, as in le Quartier Latin, the Latin quarter. See the [quarters of Paris](#)

Quartier Latin : Covering part of the 6th arrondissement, and also part of the 5th, this is the traditional student quarter of Paris, centered on the Sorbonne and the Panthéon. The narrow pedestrian streets are full of cafés and restaurants, and the busy boulevards, particularly the Boulevard Saint Michel, known as the Boul'Mich, have bookshops, cinemas and other shops

Quatorze Juillet - 14th July : Bastille Day, the French national holiday, celebrated by a big military parade down the Champs Elysées in Paris, in the presence of the President, and firework displays in the evening in most towns and cities.

Que Choisir? French consumer magazine, similar to the UK's Which? magazine.

Queen Mary 2 : World's largest ocean liner, built in the Chantiers de l'Atlantique at Saint Nazaire, at the mouth of the Loire, and launched in 2003.

Quinté: Form of betting on horses, involving selecting the first five horses in a race. See Tiercé and PMU.

Quinzaine, une : A fortnight, two weeks.

Quinzaine commerciale, two-week period when shops in a town or shopping centre put on special offers. These special offer periods cannot be called 'Sales', since the word *Soldes*, meaning 'sales', can only be used at specific times of the year designated by the government.

Quotient familial - QF : factor applied during calculation of the income tax due by a French household. The QF is 2 for a couple with no children, 2.5 for a couple with one child, 3 for a couple with 2 children, and thereafter one point extra per additional child.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

R



Photo above: the river **Rhône** at Tournon, south of Lyon

What is a *ratatouille* ? And why are the *régimes spéciaux* increasingly controversial ? Here are the answers to these and other questions about French words or names beginning with R.

Radar, un : the expression is most commonly used to refer to speed cameras on French roads. There are two types of radars, les *radars fixes*, stationary speed cameras, and les *radars mobiles*, which may be mobile, i.e. in police vehicles, or set up in a temporary location beside the road. The presence of stationary speed cameras is always indicated by a warning sign between a couple of hundred metres and a few kilometres before the device. There is no advance warning for mobile speed cameras. The multiplication of speed cameras on French roads since the mid 1990s has led to a dramatic fall in the number of accidents and fatalities . **Radar** was also the name of a chain of French hypermarkets in the 1980s.

Raffarin, Jean-Pierre (born 1948) Prime minister of France, 2002-2005, during the second **Chirac** presidency. Raffarin resigned in 2005 after the referendum in which French voters rejected the European constitution. Lacking the political determination of **Sarkozy**, he nevertheless managed to initiate some much-needed reforms, but was perceived as a hesitating prime minister.

Rainbow Warrior - Ship belonging to Greenpeace, that was blown up and sunk in 1985, in Auckland Harbour, New Zealand, in a covert operation by the French intelligence service. A Greenpeace photographer was killed in the operation. It was revealed many years later that this operation - which was described as an act of international terrorism - had been personally authorized by President **Mitterrand**. French involvement was suspected right from the start, as the Rainbow Warrior was scheduled to protest against French nuclear testing at Mururoa Atoll, in the southern Pacific.

However, initially, the French denied all involvement, until the true story was uncovered by a pair of investigative journalists from Britain's Sunday Times newspaper.

Rance, barrage de la / usine marémotrice de la : Pioneering project to create electricity from tidal power, the Rance tidal power station was opened in 1967. The mouth of the River Rance, in northern **Brittany**, has one of the greatest tidal variations anywhere in the world. The dam is 750 metres long, and its peak power output rating is 240 Mw. It accounts for 60% of the electricity produced in Brittany - but this figure is sure to fall fast with the development of more **parcs éoliens** (wind farms) in the area.

Rassemblement national - In English the National Rally or the National movement - The new name of what was formerly the "Front National" right-wing political party. See **Front National**. In 2018 FN leader Marine Le Pen pledged to rebrand the Front National, founded by her father Jean-Marie Le Pen, as a more inclusive but equally right-wing political force. The new movement's first test of strength came in the May 2019 European Parliamentary elections, where it narrowly achieved first place with 23% of the vote, one point ahead of President Macron's LREM party. The RN remains a populist movement of the far right, though it has abandoned the former FN policy of taking France out of the EU, pledging to reform the EU from within.

Ratatouille : classic vegetable dish from the south of France, consisting of a mix of tomatoes, courgettes (zucchini), aubergines (eggplant) and onions, stewed together with herbs and olive oil, and usually served hot. However there is no precise recipe for ratatouille, and the contents can vary from place to place, even day to day.

Reblochon - A rich soft pressed cheese made in the Alps; it has quite a strong flavour, and a creamy texture.

Recteur - The chief executive of an [Académie](#), or Local Education authority, in France.

Redevance - this word most commonly refers to the annual TV licence fee paid in France. This is included with general local taxes, but households only pay the licence fee once (i.e. second homes and holiday cottages are exempt, unless the owners do not have a principal residence elsewhere in France). More generally, redevance simply means money that is due, a standard fee.

Réforme des retraites - The overhaul of the French pension system, a major financial reform that has been attempted, with only limited success, since the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy. Demographic change means that France's generous state pension system, and also private pension schemes, are finding it increasingly difficult to balance the books. The state pension system, whereby those in work pay for the pensions of those that have retired, has become unsustainable as the ratio of working people to retired people keeps falling. Among the major bones of contention in any reform of the retirement system are the age at which people can retire, and the method of calculating their pension rights. Unions have fought hard to keep privileges such as the right to retire at 60 for some professions (or even at 55 in certain cases), but this has meant increasing pension contributions by those in work, and reduced pensions for retired people.

In 2017 President Macron announced plans to reform the French retirement system from top to bottom, and this reform is likely to define the success or the failure of his presidency. Macron has vowed to put the state sector and the private sector on the same footing with regard to age of retirement and pension rights, including abolishing the notorious régimes spéciaux (see below). The planned reform meets with general approval from the French public, but is hotly contested by some unions, notably those whose members benefit from particularly advantageous pension schemes, for instant state railway employees.

Régimes spéciaux, les : Special privileged terms of retirement and pension rights for certain groups of employees, notably in the state sector. The most well-known and talked-about of the régimes spéciaux are the pension terms for employees of the former state electricity company **EDF**, and of the French railways **SNCF**, where many employees have acquired the right to retire at 50 with a full pension. Furthermore, pensions in these régimes spéciaux are index-linked to wages in the company, not to inflation, and pensions are generally calculated on the basis of the final salary. In the private sector, pensions are calculated on the basis of average salary over the best 25 years..

The régimes spéciaux, considered as **acquis sociaux**, have been achieved in the course of the years as a result of the strength of trade unions in these sectors. There is now consensus in France that they need to be reformed, and in 2019 President Macron made the suppression of these privileges one of the key measures in his reform of the French retirement system.

Région : the largest administrative subdivisions of France. Since the start of 2016, the number of regions in France has been reduced from 22 to 13 including the island of Corsica. There are four overseas regions, two (Guadeloupe and Martinique) in the Caribbean, one (Guyane) in south America, and one (La Réunion) in the Indian Ocean. Regions are made up of a very varying number of **départements**, or counties, and are generally smaller in the north than in the south. They vary in number of departments from 4 in Brittany to 12 each in the three big new combined regions of the south of France.

Regional languages: Though French remains the sole official language in France, regional authorities continue to lobby for official recognition of France's main regional languages. A very diverse country, France has a large number of regional languages, many of them used extensively in daily life. The main regional languages are **Occitanian** (the language of the **Midi**), Alsatian, Corsican, Catalan, **Basque** and Flemish. According to an **INSEE** survey of 1999, 786,000 people in France speak Occitanian, 545,000 speak Alsatian, 295,000 speak Breton, 133,000 speak Corsican, and 80,000 speak Basque. However, the proportion of speakers of these languages is always far lower in

younger generations, and their survival as daily living languages is not assured – whether or not these languages acquire official status.

In 2008, the French **Congress** ratified a change in the **Constitution**, accepting that regional languages are part of France's heritage.

Régionales, élections : elections to designate councillors for French regional councils. Regional councils have existed since the Law of Decentralisation (devolution) in 1982. The first public elections to choose regional councillors took place in 1986. Regional elections take place every six years, the most recent having occurred in 2004.

Regionalisation : decentralisation, devolution of power from the central government to regional and departmental authorities. The process has been ongoing since the *Loi de Décentralisation* passed in 1982.

Relevé d'identité bancaire : see RIB below.

Renault: one of France's and Europe's major motor manufacturers. The company is currently linked with the Japanese Nissan corporation, and owns the Roumanian car manufacturer Dacia. From the end of the Second World War, Renault was a state owned company, known as the *Régie Renault*. It was privatized in 1990.

Renseignements généraux RG - The name of the former French domestic intelligence agency, merged with the former DST (Direction de la surveillance du territoire), a rival intelligence agency, in early 2008, to form the new Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur.

Rentrée, la - The start of September, when activity starts up in France after the summer break. Literally "the return indoors (to work)".

Originally applying to education - *la rentrée des classes*, i.e. back to school - the word is now attached to [politics](#) - *la rentrée politique* - and to the workplace in general. In France, la rentrée is to all intents and purposes the start of the working year which runs from September to August - unlike the fiscal and calendar years which start on 1st January.

Républicains, les . Known until 2015 as the **UMP, Les Républicains** are the main traditional conservative political party in France. Initially founded as the *Union pour une Majorité Présidentielle*, to support the candidacy of Jacques Chirac in the 2002 presidential election, the name was later changed to *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*. In 2004, Nicolas Sarkozy was elected chairman of the party, a position from which he was able to launch his successful bid for the presidency. See [Political Parties in France](#) . After his successful presidential bid, Sarkozy relinquished his role as president of the UMP. Following a fractious period under the leadership of secretary general, Jean-François Copé, the UMP was renamed Les Républicains after Sarkozy took over again following his defeat by François [Hollande](#) in the 2012 presidential election. With Hollande's government plumbing depths of unpopularity in the polls, it looked as though les Républicains were on a roll to surge to victory in the 2017 elections, both presidential and parliamentary; but that was not to be. Republican presidential hopeful François Fillon was the unstoppable front-runner until becoming enmeshed in scandal following revelations that he had abused his political positions and contacts to secure handsomely paid but fictitious work for his wife, and lavishly paid student internships for his children. Fillon refused to bow out of the presidential race, and a significant proportion of Republican party members continued to support him even when the former front-runner plunged out of favour with the electorate. The elections for which nine months previously the Républicains had seemed the unstoppable winners, turned into a disaster, as Emmanuel [Macron](#) and his new centre party LREM stormed to victory.

Following their drubbing in the polls and the loss of the majority of their parliamentary seats, the Républicains regrouped under the leadership of the controversial right-wing party grandee Laurent Wauquiez, who succeeded in alienating even more voters. In an electoral alliance with the centre-right "les Centristes", the Républicains lost 12 of their 20 seats in the European parliamentary elections of 2019.

RER - Réseau Express Régional : the fast cross-city underground rail network that is a vital element in the [Paris public transport system](#). The first two main routes in the system were opened progressively in the 1960s and 1970s. Today the RER has five lines. The building of

the RER was a great achievement, giving Parisian commuters a limited-stop cross-city underground rapid-transit network that Londoners can only dream of.

Restaurants du Coeur, Les (Restos du coeur) : Food distribution charity, handing out food packages and hot meals to the needy. The organisation was set up in 1985 under the inspiration of the popular comedian Coluche (q.v.), and has since then developed to become one of the biggest charities in France. The organisation is made up of a national charity backed by 113 local organisations. In 2006-07, the *Restos du coeur* mobilized over 50,000 volunteers, distributed over 81 million meals, provided overnight shelter for 7500 people, as well as running a number of smaller social aid programmes.

Réunion, La : French overseas department (DOM) in the Indian ocean

RFF , Réseau Ferré de France : the public agency that owns and manages the rail network in France, created in 1997 the then national railway company, SNCF, was split into two divisions. SNCF is now just the train operator. See [map of the French rail network](#)

RFO (Réseau France Outre-mer) : the state regional television channel covering France's overseas departments and territories.

Rhône : 1) One of the major rivers in France, and the largest French river flowing into the Mediterranean. The Rhône rises in the canton of Valais, in the Swiss Alps, and flows through Lake Geneva, and the city of Geneva itself, before entering France just south west of the city. It then zigzags in a westerly direction through the Bugey area of France, as far as the city of [Lyon](#). At Lyon, where the river is met by its biggest tributary, the Saône, it turns due south, and flows down to the Mediterranean. The mouth of the Rhone is a delta in the area of the [Camargue](#), a short distance to the west of [Marseilles](#). The Total length of the Rhone is 813 km. just over 500 miles. The river is navigable - with canals in places - from the Mediterranean as far as Lyon, and is a major shipping route. However the river flows relatively fast through the steep valley to the south of Lyon, and navigation is not always easy, notably when the river is in spate. The lower valley of the Rhône is a famed wine producing area, with a number of [AOC](#) vineyards, most notably the vineyards of Côtes du Rhone

Rhône : 2) The name of the French department, no. 69, whose capital is [Lyon](#), the second city in France, population 1.8 million.

Rhône Alpes: Region of France, lying mostly between the Rhone and the Italian border, but also extending to the west of the Rhône. Capital Lyon. Second city Grenoble. It is one of the more prosperous regions in France.

RIB - Relevé d'identité bancaire : a document provided for customers by all banks, and indicating details of a bank account, in a standard format. Creditors frequently request a RIB before making a transfer in favour of a beneficiary. Most RIBs these days also indicate IBAN (International Bank Account Number) details as well.

RMA: Revenu Minimum d'Activité. French version of a Workfare policy, introduced by the **Raffarin** government in 2004, whereby someone who was previously a long-term unemployed can continue to obtain benefit after taking up part-time employment. The system has been replaced by a new system called **RSA, Revenu de Solidarité Active**.

RMC Radio Monte Carlo - in the age of state monopolies over broadcasting, French listeners could tune into a number of stations that were not under government control because they were broadcast from just outside France. For listeners in the south of France, RMC was the most popular such station. Today it remains one of the main private radio stations in France.

RMI : Revenu minimum d'insertion : Pronounced Air-em-ee. Welfare benefit paid to those, aged over 25, who have no right to any other source of income (no unemployment benefit). In 2007, there were about 1.3 million recipients of this benefit in France. In January 2008, it

was worth 448 Euros a month for a single person. The RMI was replaced in July 2009 by the **RSA**.

Rocard, Michel (1930 - 2016) : Prime Minister of France from 1988 to 1991, in the second Mitterrand presidency. A Protestant socialist, Rocard founded the Parti Socialiste Unifié in 1960, and stood for the presidency in 1969. Later he joined the Socialist Party, and after François Mitterrand was reelected to the presidency for a second term, he appointed Rocard as Prime Minister. Rocard represented a moderate socio-liberal tendency in the Socialist Party.

Roland Garros: the most famous French tennis club, located in Paris. The Roland Garros tournament, held at the end of May / start of June, is the French Open. It is one of the world's four Grand-Slam tennis tournaments, with Wimbledon, the US Open and the Australian Open. The tennis stadium is named after Roland Garros, a pioneering French aviator who died in 1918.

Roquefort the most famous of France's many blue cheeses is a Mediterranean classic, a blue cheese made from sheep's milk. The village of Roquefort sur Soulzon is situated on the edge of the **Causse du Larzac**, a few miles south west of **Millau** in the Aveyron department. Historically, Roquefort was made from the milk of the sheep that grazed on the barren Causses; but nowadays, a lot of the milk used to produce the cheese is shipped in from other parts, as far away as **Corsica**. Nonetheless, to benefit from the geo-specific label, Roquefort cheese has to be made and matured in the traditional region..... (see [Cheeses](#))

Royalistes: either supporters of the monarchy, or supporters of the socialist Ségolène Royal - depending on the circumstances.

Royal , Ségolène. Socialist politician , former députée and former minister, until 2014 Présidente of the Poitou-Charentes regional council. Ségolène Royal was the unsuccessful Socialist candidate in the 2007 French presidential election, that was won by Nicolas Sarkozy. She obtained 47% of the vote in the runoff. In 2007, she briefly managed to reunite a large part of the factious Socialist party behind her candidacy, but failed to keep up the momentum after defeat. In 2008, she was beaten by Martine [Aubry](#) in the leadership contest for the Socialist Party. Only a handful of votes separated the two contestants, and there was a recount. Many of Royal's supporters refused to accept the final verdict, and accusations of ballot rigging continued to be made well into 2009.

The former partner of François Hollande, she was drafted into his second government in 2014 to serve as Environment and Energy secretary.

RPR - Rassemblement pour la République; in the times of Jacques Chirac, the name of the mainstream conservative (Gaullist) party, previously known as the UDR ,subsequently renamed the UMP and since 2015 as Les **Républicains** (see above)

RSA : *Revenu de solidarité Active*. Introduced experimentally in 34 Departments in 2007, RSA is a type of workfare programme designed to encourage people on low incomes back to work, by allowing the cumulation of pay and benefits, to ensure that they are better off when working than they would be if out of work. The idea is strongly supported by President **Sarkozy**, and the system was generalized throughout France in June 2009. However, the project has caused tension among French conservatives, on account of the proposal to finance the measure through an additional tax of 1.1% on unearned income.

RTL: Radio Télévision Luxembourg. In the age of state monopolies over broadcasting, French listeners could tune into a number of stations that were not under government control because they were broadcast from just outside France. For listeners north eastern France, RTL was one of two popular stations; though thanks to the power of its transmitter in Luxembourg, RTL could actually be picked almost throughout the country. Today it is the most popular radio station in France.

RTT : Réduction du Temps de Travail: With the introduction of the 35-hour working week in 2000, most employees found themselves with a shortened working week. In many cases, employers preferred to keep more or less the same working hours as they had applied previously,

but allow employees to build up extra days of holiday by accumulation of the excess hours worked. These days are known as *journées RTT*. The system is now being phased out, as many employers are increasing the working week following the Sarkozy government's liberalisation policy



An A-Z Dictionary of France

S



What is the *SMIC* and what is an *SDF* ? Where is the *Stade de France*? And why was ex-president *Sarkozy* summoned before judges in 2014?

Answers to these questions and plenty more on this S page of the dictionary of France.

S.A. , Société Anonyme : the French equivalent of a British PLC or Public Limited company. A French Société Anonyme is a joint stock company with at least seven shareholders, and a minimum capital of 37,000 Euros for a non-quoted company, or 225,000 Euros if the company has a stock market quotation. See also SAS.

Sacré Cœur : Fine nineteenth-century basilica, sitting on the Butte Montmartre, a hill in the north of Paris overlooking the city. See guide to [Montmartre](#)

Saint-Cyr : French military academy, the equivalent of the US West Point or Britain's Sandhurst. Located at Saint Cyr l'Ecole, just west of Paris, this military academy was founded under Napoleon in 1802. It trains the elite officer corps of the French army and of the Gendarmerie, the national police force that comes under military command in France. Graduates of this school are known as Saint-Cyriens. For most of its existence the school has only trained male students; but in 1983 it was opened up to female recruits. The school has a second campus at Coëtquidan, in the west of Brittany.

Saint Emilion wines : Reputed wines produced in a small wine-producing area in southwest France, north-east of Bordeaux. See [wine guide](#)

Saint-Laurent, Yves : (1936-2008). The most famous French fashion designer of the second half of the twentieth century. Taken on as a teenager by Christian Dior in the early fifties, Saint-Laurent so impressed his boss that Dior chose him as his successor. When Dior died suddenly in 1958, Saint-Laurent found himself head designer at the age of 21. After serious health problems, Saint-Laurent set up his own *haute-couture* (high fashion, designer clothes) company in 1961, with industrialist Pierre Bergé. After that, Saint-Laurent never looked back, as his fashion house became reputed as the trendsetter in French high fashion.

Saint Nectaire : a cheese made in the Auvergne region of France. Further details in the article on French [cheese](#)

Salers. A type of cheese from the Auvergne; see **Cantal**

Samaritaine, la. - one of the most famous department stores in Paris, and for a long time the biggest. The store, which had financial problems, closed in 2005 - officially because the old buildings did not meet modern safety standards. In theory, once the buildings have been totally renovated, the store will reopen in 2011.

SAMU - Service d'Aide Médicale d'Urgence : The French emergency ambulance service. SAMU units are attached to hospitals with emergency departments, and can be called up using the national emergency phone number, which is 15. See [Medical emergencies in France](#)

Sans papiers, les - expression used to refer to those who would be known as "illegal immigrants" in English-speaking countries. Sans papiers, literally people without papers, are aliens who are in France without having the required residence or work permits. Though accurate figures are impossible to establish, 2009 estimates put the number of sans-papiers in France at between 200,000 and 400,000. Recent

governments have adopted increasingly firm policies with regard to the expulsion of illegal immigrants, but there has been no noticeable drop in the number of sans papiers in French cities. In 2009, French residency was granted to almost 7,000 sans papiers whose children were officially enrolled in school in France.

Sarkozy, Nicolas, born 1955. President of France 2007-2012. Conservative politician. As Minister of the Interior (Home Secretary) under Jacques Chirac, and president of the conservative UMP party, Sarkozy earned a reputation as a tough-talking no-nonsense hard-liner. He became the bugbear of the Socialist opposition, and the bogeyman of the far left, to the extent that the 2007 presidential election was as much about stopping Sarkozy as about electing a president. In the end, Sarkozy emerged as the most convincing candidate, and won the election with a clear majority.

The son of a Hungarian immigrant, Sarkozy has a background very different from that of any other recent French president. More Atlanticist, less nationalistic, he set about strengthening links between France and the USA and France and the UK, while reaffirming links with France's continental neighbours. He also sought to strengthen the links between the countries surrounding the Mediterranean.

He pledged to reform France during his presidency, but his reforms were all watered down in the face of strong opposition from French trade unions and also from members of his own party, fearful for their seats in parliament or local authorities. He did manage to push through a significant, but not very radical, reform of higher education, and a reform of the French state pension scheme; but he failed to address France's massive debt problems, the continued rise of the far-right, or the problem of endemic unemployment; and his timid pro-business measures were lambasted by the opposition as "presents for the bosses". All his attempted reform measures displeased more people than they pleased, and in the end he lost his bid for reelection in 2012, being replaced as president by François [Hollande](#).

After leaving office, Sarkozy kept a low profile; but in 2013 rumours began to circulate that he might make a return to politics, and stand for the presidency again in 2017. These were fuelled in particular by the bitter in-fighting that split the UMP party between the hardliners, led by Jean-François Copé, and the centre-right, led by former PM François Fillon. In an internal election to choose the party leader following the failure of Sarkozy to obtain reelection in 2012, Copé – whose team organised the election – was proclaimed leader, by a very narrow margin. The result was hotly contested by the Fillonists. Copé was finally ousted in mid 2014 following revelations of his relations with a company, called Bygmalion, accused of seriously over-invoicing the UMP for its events management services. Amidst all this blood-letting, the UMP decided in May 2014 to appoint a triumvirate of former Prime-Ministers (Juppé, Raffarin and Fillon) to lead the party pending the election of a new leader in the Autumn.

Against this background, the possible reemergence of **Sarkozy** as a saviour became the topic of increasing speculation in the media and social media. However, as the new buzz spread, so too did new accusations of his involvement in a raft of illegal operations during the time before and during his presidency. Among these are: a) a Libyan connection, accusations that Col. Ghaddafi helped fund Sarkozy's 2007 election campaign, b) involvement in the rigging of a state payoff to businessman Bernard Tapie over the Credit Lyonnais affair in 2008, c) involvement in the Bettencourt affair concerning accusations of tax evasion by French business empress Liliane Bettencourt (30% share L'Oréal, the company founded by her father). Charges that Sarkozy was involved in the Bettencourt affair were dropped in 2013.

On July 1st 2014, Sarkozy was held in detention by Anti-Corruption judges over accusations of trying to pervert the course of justice with regard to investigations concerning the various affairs, notably the Bettencourt affair.

Sarkozy supporters claimed that the former president was the subject of a witch-hunt by political opponents, designed to prevent his return to politics and to draw attention away from the poor performance and unpopularity of the Hollande government.



In November 2014, he returned to the forefront of political life in France, by getting elected as the new leader of the UMP, but failed to get nominated as the party's candidate in the 2017 presidential elections. .

SARL - Société Anonyme à Responsabilité Limitée : Private limited company. The SARL is the usual structure for small companies in France: there are some 1.5 million SARLs in France today. For many years, a minimum capital was required in order to set up an SARL, but this requirement has now been removed. The chief executive of a SARL is generally known as the *Gérant*, or the *Directeur*. Shareholders are known as *associés*; the minimum number of members is 2, the maximum 100. Shares in a SARL may only be transferred to a third party with the consent of the other shareholders.

SAS - Société par Actions Simplifiée : a corporate structure in between that of **SA** (Public limited company) and **SARL** (Private limited company), set up in 1994. SAS are not quoted on the stock exchange. This structure is particularly favoured for the setting up of wholly-owned subsidiaries within a corporate group structure.

Saumur : A town in the Loire valley, famous for its national (formerly military) riding school, and its elite cavalry unit, the Black Brigade (le Cadre Noir). Once a military unit, the Cadre Noir is now made up of civilian and military riders; it represents France in international equestrian events, and provides top-level riding displays. Saumur is also known for its white wines.

SBF 250. A broader based stock market index than the benchmark **CAC 40**, the SBF 250 charts the performance of 250 large and medium sized companies quoted on the Paris stock exchange, **la Bourse**. SBF stands for Société des Bourses Françaises)

Schtroumpfs, les : In English known as the *Smurfs*. Heroes of a popular series of cartoon books, the Schtroumpfs are little blue homunculi who live in a village of mushroom houses in the middle of a forest. Theirs is a generally ideal world, far superior to that of humans, a world where the only major permanent threat comes in the form of the human giant Gargamel and his cat Azraël.

Sciences Po : Name used, even formally, by the *Institut des Etudes Politiques de Paris*, an autonomous state-funded school of higher education (grand établissement), founded in 1872, and a university in all but name. The undergraduate course at *Sciences Po*, designed to produce graduates with a solid understanding of the workings of the modern world, is a pluridisciplinary degree covering a range of social sciences, including history, law, politics, economics, sociology, and foreign languages. Many leading French politicians, businessmen and civil servants have degrees from *Sciences Po*, and the school's increasing success has led to the opening of smaller campuses, offering specialist courses, in Dijon, Poitiers, Menton and Nancy.

Sciences Po is one of the top ranked institutes of higher education in France and in Europe, and competition for places is stiff. The school runs joint degree courses with several top international schools, including the universities of Columbia and Georgetown in the USA, and LSE in Great Britain. Many leading French politicians, businessmen and civil servants have degrees from Sciences Po, and the school's increasing success has led to the opening of smaller campuses, offering specialist courses, in Dijon, Poitiers, Menton and Nancy.

The official Aeres audit of Sciences Po in 2008 described the institution as being "seen from abroad as a typically French institution, rather difficult to situate and to comprehend." It defined the school's mission as being to train graduates with "knowledge, but also understanding, of society and the world... in short to educate them".

The name 'Sciences Po' is also used commonly to refer to Instituts d'Etudes Politiques (IEP) attached to a number of universities.

SDF - Sans domicile fixe : person of no fixed address, homeless person.

Secrétaire d'Etat : junior minister (in government)

Sécu, see Sécurité Sociale

Sécurité Sociale, *la* (see also Caisse Primaire): the French national health insurance scheme. This expression does not usually translate into English as "social security", but is the French equivalent of Britain's NHS. All people in work must pay contributions into the Sécurité Sociale; as a result, they and their dependents receive largely subsidised or free health treatment. In recent years, the cost of running the health service has mushroomed, and the "trou" or hole in the Health Service budget has grown; this has led to the introduction of token charges, a reduction in the reimbursement of certain medicines, and other cost-cutting measures. While the French health care system remains among the best in the world, and primary [health care in France](#) is generally excellent, waiting lists have begun to appear for certain types of specialist treatment, and some hospital services have been closed for economic reasons.

Seine: one of the longest rivers in France, 776 km in length from its source, near Langres in the Haute Marne department, to its mouth near le Havre, on the Channel coast. The catchment area of the Seine and its tributaries covers almost a third of the surface of France; the principal tributaries are the Marne, the Oise, the Yonne and the Aube. The Seine is navigable for 445 kilometres from its mouth, and is particularly busy in the area of Paris. The original city of [Paris](#) was built on or close to (historians are divided on the subject) two islands in the middle of the river, known today as the Ile de la Cité and the Ile Saint Louis.

SEITA - The Société Nationale d'Exploitation Industrielle des Tabacs et Allumettes was, until 1999, the state-owned French national tobacco company. In 1999, it merged with the Spanish manufacturer Tabacalera, to become Altadis. Altadis was taken over by Imperial Tobacco in 2008.

Sénat. The French upper house, the Senate is made up of 321 Senators, elected by indirect universal suffrage for a term of nine years. One third of the seats in the Senate are renewed every three years.

Série noire : the expression is used figuratively to evoke a succession of disasters or problems. Literally *la Série Noire* is an imprint that published collections of fairly basic detective stories and crime fiction, mostly translated from the American.

SFR : French telecommunications giant, the initials standing originally for Société Française de Radiophonie. One of the leading French mobile phone and internet providers, in 2019 SFR had 21% of the landline market

SMIC Salaire Minimum Interprofessionnel de Croissance : The French minimum wage. A person earning minimum wage is called a Smicard. France has had a minimum wage since 1950; the SMIC was introduced in 1970. In mid 2019, the gross minimum hourly wage in France was 10.03 € per hour - but net SMIC, after social security deductions, was 7.72 €. In France, social security contributions are due on all wages, even for the lowest paid..

Smoking : France is among the countries that has introduced widescale bans on smoking in public places. Indoor smoking has been banned in workplaces, shops, airports, railway stations, schools and universities, etc. since February 2007, and in bars and restaurants since the start of 2008.

SNC. Société en nom collectif. A partnership; business structure without the advantages of limited liability. Frequently used for professional partnerships.

SNCF : Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer : The French national railway company. SNCF still enjoys a virtual monopoly over passenger train operations in France, though this is scheduled to change. Freight operations have been opened up to competition since 2005, and there are now seven licenced freight operators, though SNCF still operates over 90% of freight services. See [rail travel in France](#).

Société Générale - One of the largest French banks, SG was rocked in 2007 by a stock-trading scandal that resulted in huge losses for the bank; however, it has largely recovered from this incident which occurred just as many banks were being shaken by financial losses connected to the collapse of the US sub-prime market.

Société Protectrice des Animaux: See **SPA**.

Soixante-huit, or 68 : the milestone year in French life and politics in the second half of the 20th century, when protests by students and workers almost brought down the French government, and led to sweeping changes in French society. The events of 68 were inspired and led by the young generation of the time, wishing to break out of the rather stuffy and conventional society of the time. They coincided with, though initially took a different form to, the 'youth revolution' in Britain and the USA; but while the UK's youth revolution was essentially social and cultural, and led by pop music and op art, France's revolution was political and cultural, a protest against the weight of the Gaullist state.

The events of May 68 started on the drab concrete campus of the sprawling university of Nanterre in the northern suburbs of Paris, and quickly spread to other universities, notably the **Sorbonne**. Student leaders, among them Daniel **Cohn-Bendit** and Alain **Krivine**, called for radical change and the end of the 'bourgeois state'; students erected barricades in the **Latin Quarter**, and were soon joined by workers, notably from the huge **Renault** plant at Boulogne Billancourt in the Paris suburbs. Though political, the movement sidelined all existing political parties, including the Communists, considered by the new left-wing as being an 'obsolete' political force.

Faced with turmoil on the streets and a partial collapse of French society, President de **Gaulle** fled to Germany on 29th May, before returning and promising new elections. But by the time the elections took place, the **Grenelle** agreements had been negotiated with the trade unions, the heat had died down, and many French people had become seriously alarmed by the turn of events. In the June elections, the Gaullist majority was returned to power with an increased majority.

The events nevertheless marked the beginning of the end for de Gaulle. In 1969 he organised a referendum on **decentralisation**, promising to step down if the referendum failed. To a certain extent, de Gaulle's vision of decentralisation was not that wanted by the voters; but in addition, the referendum became seen as a plebiscite on the Gaullist system, rather than on decentralisation. The referendum proposal was rejected by 52.4% of voters, and de Gaulle stepped down.

It is certain that a new France, less hide-bound, more emancipated and more free, emerged in the aftermath of 68. Whether this would have happened anyway, and whether the means justified the end, are questions about which there is still considerable debate in France to this day.

Soixante-huitard : "Sixty-eighter " , person who lived through, influenced or was influenced by the 'events' of 1968, **soixante-huit**. "Soixante-huitards" are reputed to be strongly anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment and very individualistic. The word is often used as a term of disparagement, as soixante-huitards are blamed by many French conservatives, including Nicolas Sarkozy, for exercising a strong but not always constructive influence over the evolution of French institutions in the forty years since the "events".

Soldes, les : Sales (in the sense of cut-price sales). In theory, France has strict laws governing sales. There are two periods of the year when shops can put on sales, one in January-February (*les Soldes d'hiver*) , and the other in July (*les Soldes d'été*). The precise dates are fixed by the government, and may vary from town to town. Other than closing-down sales, these periods are the only times of the year when shops can announce that they are having 'sales'.

As a result, most shops and traders' associations revert to various other forms of terminology, and sales techniques, to put on events that are *soldes* in all but name. *Les 3-Jours*, or **Quinzaine commerciale**, or *journées discount* are three examples. Alternatively, shops fill their

shelves with special offers.

See also [Braderie](#).

Sorbonne, la - One of the world's oldest universities, founded in 1257. The Sorbonne is, historically, the University of Paris. Following the breaking up of the huge university of Paris in 1970, into thirteen smaller (but still large) universities, the word "Sorbonne" was kept in the name of four of the new establishments, and specifically in the university now known as "Université de **Paris IV** - Sorbonne". This is the top-ranking Paris university for the fields of arts and social sciences. The three other "Sorbonne" universities are **Paris III** Sorbonne nouvelle (arts and social sciences), **Paris I** Panthéon-Sorbonne (Law, economics and human sciences), and Université de **Paris V** - Descartes, Sorbonne (Medicine, maths, law and social sciences). These four universities share the historic Latin quarter university buildings, but also have campuses, teaching-blocks, libraries and research facilities throughout Paris and the inner suburbs. See full article on [higher education in France](#).

SOS Racisme : Anti-racist youth organisation set up in 1984 in response to the rise of the **Front National** and xenophobic attitudes in many French cities. Among the founders of the movement were Harlem Désir and Julien Dray, both now influential members of the Socialist Party; for this and other reasons, SOS Racisme has been accused of using the issue of racism for political ends; despite this, the organisation has played - and continues to play - an important role in promoting racial harmony , and raising people's awareness to the dangers of racism in France.

Sous-Préfet : Sub-prefect, the representative of a [Préfet](#) , in charge of a "Sous-Préfecture", the local offices a main Prefecture located in the major secondary towns of a department.

St. Pierre et Miquelon. The only remaining French territory in North America, St. Pierre et Miquelon are composed of a group of small islands in the entrance to the St. Lawrence river, some 100 miles south of Newfoundland.

Stade de France: France's most prestigious sports stadium, opened in 1998. The 80,000-seat Stade de France is located in Saint Denis, in the northern suburbs of Paris, midway between central Paris and Charles de Gaulle (CDG) airport. It is the venue for the most important football and rugby matches in France, and for major Athletics events and concerts.

Strasbourg : Capital of the **Alsace** region, [Strasbourg](#) is one of the two seats of the European Parliament. Located a short distance from the west bank of the Rhine, Strasbourg is the seventh largest city in France, and its urban area has a population of over 700,000 inhabitants. The city was recently linked to Paris with the new eastern **TGV** service.

Strauss-Kahn, Dominique : professor of economics, minister of economics in the government of Lionel Jospin, later appointed head of the IMF, and credited with very successful management of the post 2007 economic crisis. Popularly known as "DSK", Strauss-Kahn was widely tipped to win the French presidential election in 2012 as the candidate of the Socialist Party. But in May 2011, he experienced a total fall from grace after being accused in the USA of sexual assault on a hotel cleaner - a charge he strenuously denied. Photos of the handcuffed and dishevelled DSK being led by New York police caused outrage in France from DSK's friends and foes alike, since the publication of such photos of a person considered innocent until proved guilty is quite illegal under French privacy law. However in spite of DNA evidence of a sexual encounter, all charges against him were later dropped following evidence of inconsistencies in the allegations of the plaintiff.

Strikes: see **Conflits sociaux**

SUD: Acronym for *solidaire, unitaire et démocratique* , used in the name of a number of militant left-wing unions, notably in the railways, in the state education system, and the post office. SUD unions were initially set up in the 1990s by militants who felt that the main unions, the

CGT and the CFDT, were going soft.

Suez : Name of a former Franco-Belgian industrial conglomerate, which merged with Gaz de France in 2007, to form GDF-Suez and Suez-Environnement: GDF Suez was the world's third largest energy company. In 2015 it changed its name to **Engie**.

Suisse normande: nickname given to an area in the south of the departments of the Calvados and the Orne in **Normandy**, on account of its hilly terrain, unusual for this part of France. Though the hills are graced by a few crags, they only reach a maximum elevation of 345 metres and are can in no way be described as alpine.

Suisse romande : The area of western **Switzerland** which is French-speaking; this is made up of the cantons of Geneva, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Jura, Valais, and a part of the canton of Fribourg.

Surface area. The surface area of France is 550,000 km², making it the largest country in Western Europe, and about 20% of the total surface area of the European Union in 2002. Two thirds of the surface area of France is covered by plains, largely agricultural, the remaining third by several ranges of mountains, notably the **Alps**, the **Pyrenees**, the **Massif Central**, the **Jura**, the **Ardennes**, the **Vosges** and the **Morvan**. 26% of the surface area of France is now covered by forest, the French forest being the third most extensive in Europe after Sweden and Finland. The proportion of France covered by forest (see **Landes, Forests**) has doubled in the past 200 years.

Syndicat: the French term for a trade union, or labor union. In France, trade unions are generally large organisations that spread across all sectors of labour, rather than sector-specific unions, and they are differentiated from each other by their political militancy and attachments. The three biggest unions are the **CGT** (formerly linked to the Communist party), the **CFDT**, and **F.O.** (Force Ouvrière). Many sector-specific unions (such as the SGEN - CFDT - Syndicat Général de l'**Education National**) are federated within these larger organisations. French trade unions have a degree of political and social power in France which far exceeds their representativity. Trade union membership in France is low by international standards - around 10% of the workforce (which is lower even than in the USA); yet as virutually the only form of legally constituted employee organisations, unions benefit from the position of privileged "social partners" (**partenaires sociaux**) in a whole range of situations where decisions must be taken after discussion between employers and employees, or government and representatives of labour. See also **paritarisme**, **SUD**.

Syndicat d'Initiative, S.O. - The old term used to describe what is most often called an "Office de Tourisme", or Tourist Information Centre, in more recent terminology.



An A-Z Dictionary of France

T



When did the first **TGV** run in France ? What is **TF 1** ? And when was the **Tour Eiffel** built ? And what is the **Tiercé** ? Answers to these questions and plenty more on this page of the dictionary of France.

Tabac brun - Brown tobacco : (Also called *black* tobacco in English) Until the 1980s, most of the cigarettes smoked in France were French brands, made with brown tobacco, a stronger more pungent version of tobacco than the classic blond tobacco of the new world. The tobacco was either grown in France, or imported from the Near East (Turkey in particular). The three most popular brands were [Gauloises](#), Gitanes and Disque Bleu. Brown tobacco was popular throughout southern Europe. Today, in a country that is more health conscious and where [smoking bans](#) are in force, brown tobacco has gone out of favour; the once famous French brands are now no longer manufactured in France.

Tabloid press : France does not have a "tabloid press" in the way that the UK has the *Sun* the *Daily Express* or the *Mirror*, or Germany has *Bild Zeitung*. There are no national daily tabloids, since the daily press in France is largely a regional press, with one or at most two middle-of-the range regional dailies per region. The main national newspapers, such as le **Monde** and le **Figaro**, are quality dailies, with relatively low circulation. No paper in France has the massive circulation, and thus influence, of the British or German tabloids. The nearest French equivalents to "the tabloids" are **France Dimanche** and **Ici Paris**, which are more "people" weeklies than "tabloid press." For more information see article on [Daily newspapers in France](#).

Tancarville, Pont de - Suspension bridge across the estuary of the Seine, near Le Havre. When it was opened in 1959, it had the longest central span in Europe (608 metres)..

Tapie, Bernard - Flamboyant French businessman, former owner of Adidas and the Olympique Marseille football club. Tapie was also for two short periods (1992 - 93) Minister for Towns in the Socialist government of Pierre Bérégovoy. Tapie also had several run-ins with the law for financial and fiscal reasons, and received a prison sentence in 2005 for tax fraud.

Tati, Jacques (1907 -1982) - French film director, best remembered for his comedies, notably *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953) and *Trafic* (1971).

Taxe d'habitation - residence tax, one of the local taxes due in France. Monies raised from this tax go to local authorities, and are divided between the different levels of these. Since 2005, the television licence fee (*redevance*) has been billed to people with the tax on their principal residence.

Taxe foncier - land tax, rates.

TER - *Transport Express Régional*, or *Train Express Régional*. Express regional transport services, mostly trains but also coach services. Since 2002, following pilot projects in certain regions, the planning of TER services and the fixing of ticket prices has been devolved from central government to the [Conseils Régionaux](#). Regional management of the services has led to a considerable development of services in many regions, to new train sets, and to the upgrading, at the regions' behest, of many regional or inter-regional routes. TER services, much used by commuters and young people, are heavily subsidised.

TF 1 - the most popular commercial French TV channel, formerly the first channel of the state television network, before it was privatised.

TGV Train Grande Vitesse : High speed train. France has Europe's oldest and most extensive network of dedicated high-speed railway lines. The TGV entered service in 1981, and the Paris-Lyon dedicated line was largely completed in 1983, bringing journey times between the two cities down to just 2 hours. At present (2019), the network consists of 2814 km (over 1600 miles) of dedicated high-speed track, comprising four routes radiating out from Paris. An "interconnection" route round the south and west of Paris allows high-speed connections between the routes, notably allowing north-south TGVs to avoid the centre of Paris. Depending on the stock and the route, TGVs travel at speeds up to 270 km/hr or 320 km/hr. The TGV holds the current officially recorded world rail speed record, of 574.8 km/hr (357.2 m.p.h.).

Thalys: the high-speed train service linking Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam. The carriages are painted maroon.

Thibaud, Bernard, leader of the [CGT](#) trade union from 2009 to 2013.

Thirty five hour week. See trente-cinq heures, below.

Tiercé : Very popular form of betting on horse-races in France. The Tiercé involves guessing the first three horses in a race, and money is paid out to those who get the result 'in the order' or 'out of order'. There is also prize-money for getting two out of the three. Since its introduction, a version involving the first five horses, called the Quinté, has supplanted the tiercé as the most popular form of betting in France. The Tiercé is managed by the **PMU**.

Tiers provisionnel: for people paying their income-tax in three payments, the first annual payment, whose amount is calculated on the basis of the total tax paid the previous year.

Tixier-Vignancourt, Jean-Louis (1907-1989)- Lawyer and right-wing nationalist politician who was a candidate in the presidential elections in 1965, where his campaign manager was Jean-Marie Le Pen.

TOM. *The Territoires d'Outre Mer*. The last four existing French colonies, namely **French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Fatuna**, and the **French Antarctic Territories**.

Tomme - word used to describe a number of different cheeses in France, particularly pressed cheeses. Examples tomme des Pyrénées, or Tomme de Savoie.

Total : France's biggest oil company, and the fourth largest oil company in the world. A CAC-40 company. Prior to 2003, Total was called Total-Fina-Elf, indicating the three historic oil companies in the group. Total is the largest capitalisation on the French stock exchange.

Toulon: Port city, and capital of the Var department (83), Toulon is the site of the main French naval base on the Mediterranean, and home of the Mediterranean fleet. ► See [Toulon](#)

Tour de France - the [world's premier Cycling race](#). ► See [Tour de France](#).

Tour Eiffel : The Eiffel Tower, Paris, a monument built by the engineer Gustave Eiffel, for the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889. The 325 metre high tower has become **the** symbol of Paris, and is the world's no.1 paid-entry tourist attraction, with over 6 million visitors in 2007. ► See [Eiffel tower](#).

Toussaint : 1st November, All Saints Day. a public holiday in France. On this day, the French traditionally visit the graves of their ancestors, and decorate them with flowers.

Transilien : (adj) Name applied to the Paris suburban transport network, [Transport](#) for the [Ile](#) de France.

Trente-cinq heures, les : (see also **RTT**) In the year 2000, the socialist government of Lionel **Jospin** reduced the statutory working week in France from 39 hours to 35 hours - without loss of salary. Though the measure was accompanied by other changes in workplace legislation, including greater flexibility for employers and employees, and though the productivity of labour in France increased by over 4% as a result, the introduction of the 35-hour working week was not a good move for the French economy, particularly at a time of increasing globalization, and the rapid development of imports manufactured in low-labour-cost countries. The conservative **Raffarin** and **Villepin** governments tinkered with reform of the system that was much decried by employers, but failed to take any major action for fear of the trade unions and of hostile public reaction. It was not until the **Sarkozy** presidency that the official 35-hour working week legislation was to all intents and purposes rendered obsolete.

Tribunal Administratif. Branch of the judiciary whose specific purpose is to hear complaints brought by citizens against public bodies and administrations. Examples include investors suing **la Poste**, the French Post Office, for having given them flawed investment advice, or students complaining about irregularities in the organisation of exams in the **Education Nationale**.

Tribunal correctionnel. The most common form of criminal court, for the hearing of cases involving minor offences. See also **Cour d'Assise**.

Tribunal de Grande Instance. The main civil courts in the French legal system.

Tribunal d'Instance : The lowest level in the hierarchy of the French courts system, for the hearing of small cases. The Tribunal d'Instance is the French equivalent of a UK Magistrate's Court, except for the fact that a TI is overseen by a *juge*, a stipendiary magistrate (i.e. a trained jurist, paid for the job) , not by Justices of the Peace (unpaid volunteer citizens). The concept of Justice of the Peace, as found in many English-speaking countries, does not exist in the French legal system.

Tricolore. The French flag, composed of three equal vertical bands of blue, white and red. Originally, the red and the blue were the colours of the Paris national guard, and the white was the colour of French royalty. The design of the flag is generally attributed to General Lafayette in 1789.

Trois Vallées, les : The biggest interconnected [skiing area in France](#), and in the world, lying in the middle of the French Alps. Les Trois Vallées is based on three major ski resorts, Courchevel, Val Thorens and Les Menuires.

Trou de la Sécu, de la Sécurité Sociale. The gaping perennial deficit in the French health service budget. See Sécurité Sociale

Turboprof : teacher, notably in French university , commuting for one or two days a week to ensure teaching commitments in a provincial university.

Turbotrain : nineteen-seventies express diesel multiple-unit trains, designed to improve and speed-up train services on major rail routes in France that were not equipped for electric traction.

Tutoyer : To use the pronoun *tu* rather than *vous* - a concept that English-speakers often find hard to master correctly, *tutoyer* means addressing someone using the familiar singular *tu* form of the second person pronoun, rather than the more formal *vous* form. Fifty years ago, in formal family circles, children would address their parents using *vous* rather than *tu*; this practice has now more or less completely disappeared, and *tutoiement* is the common form of address within families and within groups of friends or workplace colleagues who know each other. The change is generational, and President Sarkozy has brought *tutoiement* right into the formal surroundings of presidential affairs. *Vouvoiement* (using *vous*) remains the norm in formal circumstances, when addressing a hierarchical superior, a stranger or someone with whom one has only occasional working relations - though the French are now quite used to speakers of other languages,

notably English-speakers, getting it wrong.

Usage in France varies from usage in Quebec, where speakers often use "tu" as a singular form of "vous" to address each other even in a business context or between strangers.

TVA – Taxe sur la Valeur Ajoutée. French Value Added Tax, or sales tax. The main rate in 2019 was 20%, and the reduced rate 5.5%. As is the custom throughout Europe, prices displayed at retail level, i.e. in shops, restaurants, hotels, domestic e-commerce websites, always include TVA, so there is nothing to be added to the price indicated when the customer comes to pay. On the other hand, prices listed for B-to-B (business to business) sales are normally indicated "hors taxe", i.e. excluding tax, since businesses will pay the tax but then reclaim it (if registered for VAT in France), or else be billed without tax in the case of cross-border sales to companies VAT registered in another European Union country



An A-Z Dictionary of France

U



What is the difference between the **UDF** and the **UDR** ? And what is an **UFR**? And who on earth was Le Père **Ubu** ? Answers to these questions and plenty more on this U page of the dictionary of France..

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>I</u>
<u>J</u>	<u>K</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>Q</u>	
<u>R</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>V</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Z</u>

UBU, le père : Ubu Roi was a play (1896) by the writer Alfred Jarry, and one of the most founding works in the movement known as the "Theatre of the Absurd". Ubu has become celebrated as the archetypal absurd figure, and in particular the adjective "*ubuesque*" is used to denounce absurd situations

UDF - Union pour la Démocratie Française, a centre-right political party founded in 1978 as a party of non-Gaullist conservative supporters of president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Built out of the previous *Républicains Indépendants* party, the UDF remained the second force on the right of French politics until 1995 when it foundered as members split their loyalties between two presidential hopefuls of the time, Jacques Chirac and Edouard Balladur. Since then, the party lost ground and support, before eventually being wound down by its leader François Bayrou, in order to set up a new centre party, the MoDem or Mouvement Démocratique, in 2007. See [Political Parties in France](#)

UDR - In the time of [General de Gaulle](#), the main conservative political party in France. Founded in 1968 as the *Union pour la Défense de la République*, (a reference to the perceived threat that the French republic had faced in 1968), it was changed to *Union des Démocrates pour la République* in 1971, before changing into the *Rassemblement pour la République*, RPR, in 1976. It subsequently became the UMP before another name change to [Les Républicains](#)

UER - see UFR below

UFR - Unité de Formation et de Recherche. The current designation of the main structural units of French universities, formerly known as Facultés and as UER (Unités d'Enseignement et de Recherche). Until the education reforms following the events of 1968, French universities had little in the way of central structure, but were made up of autonomous Faculties. *Les Facultés* were officially renamed UER (unités d'enseignement et de recherche), and then later UFR. However, many universities still use the word *Faculté* to describe some or all of their UFR, particularly where modern UFR correspond to old traditional university faculties, such as a Faculty of Science or a Faculty of Arts (*Faculté des lettres*). The word Faculté is rarely used in cases where huge old faculties have been broken down into much smaller units. See [higher education in France](#)

UMP - Conservative political party know rebranded as [Les Républicains](#) (qv)

UNI - Conservative national union of students in France; smaller than the left-wing UNEF and the moderate left FAGE, UNI has traditionally been strongest in law and science faculties.

Union de la Gauche : Alliance (1972 - 1977) of the main left-wing political parties, notably the Socialists and the Communists, that led to the election in 1981 of François [Mitterrand](#) to the presidency, and the election of a left-wing government, after 23 years of right-wing

domination of the Fifth Republic.

Universities: In France, universities are not at the top of the pinnacle of higher education. This top position is taken by **Grandes Ecoles** . However, French universities generally hold their own against all but the 'top' universities in other countries, and are remarkably productive, in terms of the balance between the number of graduates produced and the level of investment.

France has 82 state universities, plus 5 Catholic universities (and a large number of private *instituts*, some of which award degrees.) For more information, see article on [Higher Education in France](#).

Urgences, les : the A&E - accident and emergency - units of French hospitals. *Urgences* can be called out by phoning the free telephone number 15, and contacting the **SAMU**. See [Health care](#)

URSSAF- Unions de Recouvrement des Cotisations de Sécurité Sociale et d'Allocations Familiales : A network of autonomous public-service organisations, responsible for collecting employer and employee health insurance and social security contributions.

UTA - Former French international airline, since absorbed into Air France. UTA was particularly involved in flights to French overseas territories and former colonies..



An A-Z Dictionary of France

V - Z



What is the difference between **Verlan** and **Vélib** ? And what is a **voie verte**, what is "X", or a **ZNIEFF** , And who were the **Yé-Yés** ? Answers to these questions and plenty more on this U page of the dictionary of France..

Vacherin 1) A [cheese](#), better known in France as **Mont d'Or**, though as Vacherin in French-speaking Switzerland. 2) A type of ice-cream cake.

Valls, Manuel . Appointed Prime Minister of France by President Hollande in 2014. The appointment of Valls as French PM was an exceptional event, as Valls is a naturalized French citizen. Spanish by birth, and hailing from Catalonia, Valls came to France as a teenager, and took French nationality at the age of 20. He was by then already a member of the French Socialist Party. Appointed minister of the Interior in 2012, he was promoted to Prime Minister in 2014, to replace the unpopular Jean-Marc Ayrault.

Valls was noted, within the Socialist Party, as a no-nonsense hard-liner of the moderate left. For this reason he was much criticized as a "liberal" by the left wing of his own party, and by other parties on the French left. He has been described in many ways, including "a Sarkozy of the left" or even a "French Tony Blair" (for his determination to shake up and modernize the French Socialist Party).

Yet like Hollande and many other French Socialist leaders of the past, Valls' political action was limited by a need to reconcile the very different wings of his electorate and his party.

In late 2016, Valls resigned as Prime Minister in order to prepare to run as a candidate for the investiture of the Socialist Party for the 2017 presidential election. Tipped as the front runner until the first round of the primary, he was surprisingly beaten by the candidate of the far-left Benoît Hamon. Subsequently, he returned to his native Barcelona where he formed a new party and stood for mayor. His party took 6 out of 41 seats, and Valls then backed the anti-independence candidate Ada Colau, who was eventually elected as mayor.

VDQS, Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieure A quality label given to certain wines, that do not qualify for the more prestigious Appellation contrôlée (AOC) status. See [wines](#)

Vedettariat : A "vedette" is a star, film-star or showbiz personality. Vedettariat is the world of showbiz or the world of "people", or the condition of being a showbiz personality.

Veld'hiv : Le Vélodrome d'Hiver - the former Winter cycling stadium that once stood near the Eiffel Tower in Paris. It achieved notoriety in 1942 when the Nazis used it as a gathering place for Jews who had been rounded up, prior to their transport to concentration camps. In July 1995, President Jacques Chirac made a historic speech, close to the monument marking the former Veld'hiv. In what has come to be known as Le discours du Veld'hiv, Chirac became the first French president to formally recognise France's guilt in the deportation of Jews while under Nazi occupation.

Velib : Self-service bike hire system operating in Paris and several other French cities. The system can be a very cheap way to get round Paris if used 'correctly' for short trips, or a very expensive system if bikes are not quickly returned.

Vendanges tardives. In the vineyards of [Alsace](#), following the German tradition known as Spätauslese, certain grapes are left on the vine as long as possible, to increase their sugar content. The resulting wines are rich and fruity, and suitable for drinking as an aperitif.

Vendée Globe Challenge : the most high-profile of yacht-races organised in France, the Vendée Globe is a single-handed non-stop round-the-world yacht race, that takes place every four years. Participants set off from, and return to, the small port of Les Sables d'Olonne, in the

Vendée, on France's Atlantic coast. The race is open to monohull yachts up to 60 ft. in length ("Open 60" class). French yachts make up the majority of participants in the race, and the Vendée Globe has always been won by a French yacht; however in 2001 24-year-old British yachswoman Ellen MacArthur caused a sensation when she came in second, having diverted at one point to go to the assistance of another yacht that was in difficulty. The race starts in November, and yachts that complete the gruelling round-the-world journey arrive back in Les Sables d'Olonne in January or February. Thanks to continually progressing boat technology, the winning times have fallen dramatically since the race was first held in 1989-90. Titouan Lamazou, winner of the first Vendée Globe, completed the voyage in 109 days; Vincent Riou, winner in 2004-5, finished in 87 days; indeed, the first 8 competitors in the 2004-05 Vendee Globe beat Lamazou's winning time of 1990. Competitors in the 2008-2009 Vendée Globe set off from Les Sables d'Olonne on 9th November, straight into heavy seas in the Bay of Biscay. The 2016-2017 Challenge was won by skipper Armel Le Cleac'h in record time, with Welshman Alex Thompson taking second place.

Verlan : popular youth slang, or argot, formed by reversing the syllables of a word. For example, *problème* in Verlan is *blèmepro*. *Verlan* is itself a reverse-syllable word, which becomes *l'envers* (meaning backwards) when turned round. Streetwise urban youth can sometimes converse fluently using verlan for many of the key words, making their argot incomprehensible to the non-initiated. **Versailles, Château de** Magnificent royal château, built by Louis XIV, just to the south west of Paris.

Verts, les : the French Green Party, founded in 1984 from the amalgamation of two ecology parties. The French Green Party has deputies in the National Assembly, Eurodeputies (MEPs), and also a strong presence in local government in France, notably in towns or other authorities where the Greens are allied with the Socialists. As allies of the Socialists, the Greens even had two ministers in the first Jospin government from 1997 to 2002, in particular the most prominent of their leaders, madame **Dominique Voynet**.

The Greens came to prominence in the 1990s, when "red-green" alliances with the Socialists in local politics and national politics led to the election of deputies, of a number of Green mayors, and to the appointment of a number of Greens as deputy mayors in many French cities, notably including Paris. After the 2008 municipal elections, the Greens officially controlled 42 municipalities in France; however, their place in the political landscape of France was weaker than it was a decade earlier, and with the environmental issue being seized by most of France's mainstream political parties, the party faced an uncertain future as a force in French politics. However, under the inspiration of Daniel Cohn Bendit, the French Greens surged back in the 2009 european elections, coming third, just a few thousand votes behind the socialist Party. In 2010 they became EELV - Europe Ecologie Les Verts. However fracture lines were growing between the movement's militant wing and its more pragmatic politicians.

After joining the Socialist-Left government following a relatively good performance in the 2012 general elections, the Greens left the government after the appointment of Manuel Valls as prime minister. But tensions in the party were growing stronger all the time. In August 2015 the party's leaders in the Senate and the Assemblée Nationale left the party, claiming it had been taken over by the far left. Others followed.

In the December 2015 regional elections, the Greens took just 6.8% of the vote, half the share they took in the same elections in 2010.

VIE - Volontariat International en Entreprise - a popular internship scheme, run by Ubifrance, the French foreign trade development agency, whereby graduates can obtain experience by volunteering to work abroad with French companies or with French trade missions in other countries, for between 6 months and 2 years.

Vigipirate, Plan : The French homeland security alert system, first set up in 1978 by the government of Raymond **Barre**. The plan can be activated in the event of a serious risk of terrorist activity, or threat to national security. It has four levels, yellow, orange, red and scarlet. It was first activated in 1991; more recently it was activated at 'red' level in 2004 following the Madrid bombings, in 2005 after the London bombings, and 2005-6 when violence erupted in French suburbs. It is most perceptible by the presence of armed police and soldiers in

sensitive locations, such as mainline railway stations, airports, or major institutional buildings.

Since the terrorist attacks of 2015, the plan Vigipirate has been rolled out full time, with armed police and military patrolling in sensitive and busy locations in Paris and other towns and cities.

Vignette auto : French road tax disc, obligatory for all motor vehicles from 1956 to 2001. In 2001, to the great joy of French motorists, the "vignette" was abolished. While it lasted, the cost of an annual vignette varied according to the horse-power of the vehicle.

Villepin, Dominique de : Born 1953. Conservative prime minister of France, 2005-2007. A former career diplomat, Dominique de Villepin was asked by Jacques Chirac to form a government in 2005, in order to revive the flagging fortunes of France's conservatives resulting from the unpopularity of the Raffarin government. A flamboyant and aristocratic former diplomat, de Villepin had garnered considerable public support in France when, as French Foreign Secretary, he had addressed the UN assembly to roundly oppose the invasion of Iraq by US and coalition forces in 2003. However, his premiership was not the success that had been hoped for. Villepin was beset by problems and recriminations. The worst fiasco came with a 2006 plan to introduce special precarious job-contracts for young people (Contrats Premier Embauche), a plan which led to massive unrest, uniting students and labour, and an ignominious government climb-down.

Villiers, Philippe de Right-wing nationalist politician, leader of the sovereignist Mouvement pour la France (Movement for France) party. An aristocrat from the [Vendée](#) department of western France, de Villiers was for six years (1987-1993) a député (member of parliament) for Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's centre-right UDF party. He was briefly Secretary of State for communication under Jacques Chirac. Since 1997, he has sat as an independent ("non-inscrit") member of parliament for Vendée. De Villiers benefits from very strong popular support in his fief of Vendée, and is regularly returned with huge majorities – which is quite surprising for a politician of the far right. However it is as leader of the MPF and as for his action as a local politician that he has really made his mark.

It was in the 1977 that he first created the "Cinésclénie" son et lumière historical reenactment spectacle at le Puy du Fou, a castle in Vendée; since then, he has transformed the site into one of the biggest tourist attractions in France, with the addition of a permanent historical theme park. In 1988 he was elected leader of the Vendée county council (Président du conseil général), a position that he has held ever since.

Thanks to his aristocratic catholic family background, and his personal charisma, de Villiers has managed to achieve a status as the acceptable face of right-wing nationalism, quite different from that of the other right-wing leaders in France, such as Jean Marie Le Pen of the National Front. In spite of a number of brushes with the law following various pronouncements on Islam and immigration, de Villiers remains popular. His strident participation in the debate over the European Constitution was certainly a factor that contributed to French voters' rejection of the project in the 2005 referendum. However, when competing on a national stage, de Villiers' real position as a marginal figure in French politics is more apparent. As a candidate in the 2007 Presidential Election, he scored just 2.2% of the vote, and even in his Vendée heartland, only 11.3% of voters chose him in the first round.

Vin d'honneur : celebratory glass of wine, accompanied by canapés and nibbles, offered by a local council or by the organisers or sponsors of an event to a visiting group or to participants.

Vin de Pays : A quality label given to wines that have neither an Appellation Contrôlée nor a VDQS label. Vins de Pays are wines produced in a specific geographic area.

Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieure , see VDQS

Vin Jaune. An expensive apéritif wine not unlike Amontillado sherry, made exclusively from the Savagnin grape variety in the **Jura** vineyards. The most prestigious appellation for Vin Jaune is Château Chalon. This wine is made from late harvested grapes, and then left to mature in casks for at least six years.

Virement: a bank transfer (*virement bancaire*) or postal bank transfer (*virement postal*). Firms and administrations owing money to suppliers or reimbursement to customers may wish to make payment by *virement*; for this they will ask for details of the beneficiary's bank account, which must be provided in the form of a **RIB**, or *relevé d'identité bancaire*.

Vivendi One of the world's major communications and entertainment companies, notably owner of SFR telecommunications, and the international company Universal Music Group (UMG), one of the world's four biggest distributors of music. vivendi is quoted on the Paris stock exchange, and is a [CAC 40](#) company

Voici : The second-biggest selling of France's weekly 'people' magazines, Voici is published by Prisma Presse. It is a glossy magazine featuring the lives of the stars and other famous people in the news.

Voie verte : dedicated and surfaced trail for cycles and - depending on the surface - rollerblades and wheelchairs. A small part of the planned extensive national network is now in place. See [cycling in France](#).

Voile, port de la : *La Voile*, as a issue in modern France, refers to the Muslim veil, or hijab. The question began to become an issue in the late 1980s and early 1990's, when increasing numbers of girls from Muslim families began turning up at school wearing Islamic headscarves. France's state education system is founded on strict principles of *laïcité* (secularism), but the 1904 law on *laïcité* did not address the question of the wearing of Islamic headscarves. Consequently, school principals were dealing with the issue on an ad hoc basis, and with contradictory judgements, some tolerating the veil, others banning it from school. The situation became untenable, and in March 2004, Parliament passed a law banning the wearing of 'ostentation signs of religion' in schools, including Islamic veils, the Jewish kippa and large crosses. Since then, the controversy has died down, and there has been a fall in the number of pupils trying to come to school wearing forbidden items.

Volcans d'Auvergne, Parc des - One of the major Parcs Naturels Régionaux (Regional Nature Parks) in France, located in the [Auvergne region](#) of central southern France, and including a vast area of extinct volcanic uplands.

Volvic, eau de One of the most popular French mineral waters, and a great export success, Volvic natural mineral water comes from springs in the village of Volvic, in the Parc des **Volcans** regional park (see above) in the Auvergne, north of Clermont Ferrand. The brand now belongs to Danone, one of France's largest companies. In 2016, the 15 bottling lines were able to produce up to 7 million bottles a day.

Voynet, Dominique (Madame) : former leader of the French Green Party (see above, *les Verts*), and minister of the environment in the 1997 Socialist government of Lionel Jospin.

VSD : relatively popular pictorial news, leisure and general interest magazine, published each Wednesday. The letters *VSD* stand for *Vendredi, Samedi, Dimanche*, or 'Friday, Saturday, Sunday', denoting that this is a magazine for light entertainment over the weekend.

Vulcania - Volcanic theme park, located in the Parc des volcans (see above) , in the Auvergne region of southern France. The park was the brainchild of Valéry [Giscard d'Estaing](#), former President of France, and former chairman of the Auvergne regional council. It includes an Imax cinema and 3D films on the subjects of volcanoes, earthquakes and earth forces.

W

Wallis and Fatuna French overseas territory, with a population of about 15,000, located in the middle of the Pacific, between Hawaii and New Zealand. These Islands have the status of French Overseas Collectivity (Collectivité d'Outre-Mer), meaning that they are generally autonomous and make their own laws. Until 2003, Wallis & Fatuna was classed as a TOM, or Territoire d'Outre-Mer.

Wallonie : The French-speaking part of Belgium. People from this part of Belgium are known as *les Wallons*.

X, Y, Z

X : Nickname for the *Ecole Polytechnique de Paris*, one of the most prestigious of France's **Grandes Ecoles**. See [Polytechnique](#)

Yé-Yés : name given to pop musicians and the pop music generation. The expression was first coined in the 1960s, and derives from the words "Yeah, yeah, yeah" in the Beatles' first big French hit, *She loves you*, which launched Beatlemania and the pop music craze on France.

Zemmour, Eric. Far-right journalist, writer and television personality, Eric Zemmour was in 2020 one of France's best known media personalities. He is compared to Nigel Farage in the UK or Donald Trump in the USA. Zemmour holds extremely controversial views on immigration, nationality and other causes dear to the right wing. Born in 1958 into an immigrant family of Berber-Jewish descent, he graduated from the prestigious [Sciences-Po](#) school before embarking on a career in the media. He has written prizewinning books and has been an anchor on mainstream television shows. Zemmour's avowed aim is to unite the far right and the mainstream right in French politics under a single banner; however, if he were to do so, this would be likely to push moderate right voters into the centre ground, leaving many new right candidates in a largely unelectable position due to France's two-stage voting system.

In autumn 2021, speculation was rife that Zemmour would stand as a candidate in the 2022 Presidential election, potentially splitting the far-right vote to the detriment of [Marine Le Pen](#). A Zemmour candidacy is also seen as having the potential, by splitting the far-right vote, of pushing Marine Le Pen into third place in the 2022 election, thus leaving Emmanuel [Macron](#) to face a traditional left or mainstream right candidate in the runoff; and although Macron is still expected to win, the outcome of the French 2022 Presidential election would seem to be less of a foregone conclusion than if Marine Le Pen were once again the rival in the runoff.

Zénith de Paris, Le The most prestigious concert hall in Paris for variety and rock concerts, and also for large political meetings. With a capacity of over 6000 places, le Zénith de Paris is also one of the biggest venues in Paris. Opened in 1984, le Zénith was designed only as a temporary structure, pending the building of another hall close by. But having proved immensely popular, it has remained in place ever since. Indeed, its success has led to the building of other large venues also named "**le Zénith**" in a number of provincial capitals, notably Clermont Ferrand, Montpellier, Nantes and Strasbourg.

Zidane, Zinédine. Footballer, captain of the victorious French team in the 1998 world cup, staged in France. Zidane became something of a national hero after France's victories in the World Cup and the European cup that followed. Born into an immigrant family in a poor quarter of Marseille, Zidane, through his success and captaincy of the national squad, served as an ideal role model for France's hundreds of thousands of ["beurs"](#) , and as a very visible rebuttal of the racist ideology of the Front National.

ZNIEFF - Zone Naturelle d'Intérêt Ecologique Floristique et Faunistique - A natural environment which is of particular interest on account of its flora and/or fauna, the French equivalent of a UK SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).

ZPS, Zone de protection spéciale : special protection zone, an official classification designating sensitive areas for wildlife.

ZUP - Zone à Urbaniser en Priorité: largescale public housing projects (*grands ensembles*) set up in France between 1959 and 1967, to cater for the rapidly increasing urban population. By the 1990s, the term ZUP had come to be used in the sense of problem estates or sink estates, though this was by no means always the case. While some ZUP, such as le Val-Fourré in the north-west suburbs of Paris, or les Minguettes, a development of 9200 apartments in the suburbs of Lyon, were truly problem estates, others had less problems. Many of the worst ZUPs have been partly or largely demolished and are in the process of renovation as more people-friendly environments.